

# IMAGI-MOVIES

TM

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Max Von Sydow  
as King's  
Leland Gaunt

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JAPAN'S ANIMATED HORROR EROTICA  
DAVID FINCHER ON DIRECTING "ALIEN 3"





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# MOVIE IMAGINATION

Twenty-three years ago, in an editorial in the first issue of CINEFANTASTIQUE, our parent publication, its editor, our publisher, commented on the seemingly insurmountable task of writing the first editorial of a new magazine. Now, as I sit before my keyboard, only days before deadline, I finally see his point.

There is just so much you want to say that you can't decide what not to say, and you just end up saying nothing. Got that?

I guess I can start by addressing the obvious question: Why another magazine devoted to the genre of fantastic films?



The answer is success. No, not ours, though one can hope. I'm talking about CINEFANTASTIQUE'S success. For CFQ success has brought the obligation to continue doing what it has obviously done so well, covering the major films and TV series in a depth and detail seen nowhere else. But that very obligation has made it increasingly difficult for CFQ to devote much space to low-budget films, classic films, obscure films, and the people responsible for them. It's a Catch-22, but this time there is a solution. You're holding it. IMAGI-MOVIES.



Now wait just a minute, you say. Wasn't the cover of this very issue devoted to a big-budget, major production? Well...yes. It's not really our intention to cover solely the minor and obscure, any more than CFQ covers only the major films. It's more a matter of emphasis. CFQ could, and would, cover the robotic action of KNIGHTS and NEMESIS, the martial art hijinks of THE KUNG FU RASCALS, the current plans of Roger Corman, the further adventures of the MANIAC COP, the controversial animated erotica of THE WANDERING KID, or print an impassioned defense of a largely reviled genre film, ALIEN 3. It just wouldn't put them all in the same issue. We can. We have.

IM's existence came about, at least in part, due to another success, that of our sister publication, FEMME FATALES. I must confess some envy for its editor. No, not because of the scads of beautiful women who are the topic of his magazine. Well...Ok, maybe a little because of that, but mostly I envy the clearly defined vision he had for FF. I have no such solid concept for IM and, despite my envy, I really don't want one. I want IM to evolve, to change, as our readers' interests change.

Let me know what features you like, and what you don't. If there are films you think didn't get their just desserts either in praise or in criticism, then put those passions in print and send them to us in a letter, a review, or an article. Let us hear you.

In the first issue of FF editor Bill George offered a picture of himself with Brinke Stevens and Michelle Bauer. I'm not so sure anyone wants to see what I look like but maybe you wouldn't mind knowing some of the influences that made me who I am. Scattered about this page are several photos from some classic genre films. They aren't there just as filler. These are the films that over the years have spoken to me, have crawled inside my brain and left indelible images on my mind, my psyche, my imagination. These are my IMAGI-MOVIES.

To paraphrase a line from our interview with one of my greatest idols, Roger Corman, that's my theory. If I had a photo of me having dinner with the lovely Ms. Bauer and Stevens, I might have a different theory.

**John Thonen**

**IMAGI-MOVIES' influences:** 1960's PSYCHO (top) its impact is still felt in today's erotic thrillers. 1933's KING KONG (left), not just a great genre film but a great film, period. 1954's THIS ISLAND EARTH (below), a wonderful combination of imagination, pulp, sci-fi and intellectual content.



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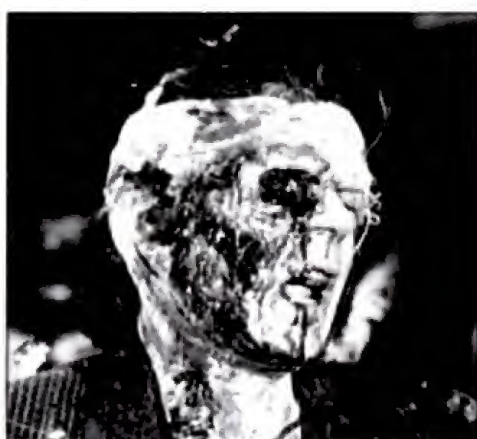
A preview of an animated tale of violence and erotica known as UROTSUKIDOJI in Japan. Even if you can't say it, we think you'll want to see it. / *Article by Todd French*



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# SINISTER SENTINEL

## BLOODSUCKERS BOUNCE BACK

The boxoffice success of BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA may have finally released Anne Rice's INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE from its 15-year internment in development hell. While the rights reverted to Rice in April, an extension was granted to allow the producers more time to try and land Daniel Day Lewis for the role of Lestat (hasn't anyone thought of Julian Sands?) with Oscar-winner Neil Jordan set to direct his revision of Rice's own script. Meanwhile, one of those anonymous Hollywood insiders has been quoted in the *L.A. Times* as saying the announced '93 production of Rice's THE WITCHING HOUR has been delayed because the novel's plot "sucks"—certainly a surprise to the millions who enjoyed the novel. This Hollywood hotshot went on to brand INTERVIEW's Louis "a whiner and a kvetch"—approximately the equivalent of terming Hamlet an indecisive clod.

## TONGUE-TIED TITLES

*Variety's* new film starts recently listed (take a deep breath) NIGHT OF THE DAY OF THE DAWN OF THE SON OF THE BRIDE OF THE RETURN OF THE REVENGE OF THE TERROR OF THE ATTACK OF THE EVIL, MUTANT, HELL-BOUND, FLESH-EATING, SUB-HUMANOID LIVING DEAD—PART 2. While it may at last usurp Corman's SAGA OF THE VIKING WOMEN AND THEIR VOYAGE TO THE WATERS OF THE GREAT SEA SERPENT crown for the longest genre title, it hardly qualifies as a "film start." Seems the producers have merely redubbed George Romero's original NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (now in the public domain) with a "funny" soundtrack. Surely there's something in the copyright laws to protect Romero and company from this. Or at least to protect us.

## DINOSAUR BLOOPERS

Roger Corman's aversion to post-production opticals



Julian Sands in Lestat mode in TALES OF A VAMPIRE, with Kenneth Cranham as Edgar Allan Poe, a British State Screen Production directed by Shimako Sato.

probably softened him to John Carl Buechler's pitch to use miniature puppets, men in suits and full-scale models for CARNOSAUR. Buechler nearly sold Corman on using them as a substitute for post-production opticals as well. Director Adam Simon managed to discourage Corman with a reel of out-takes of Buechler's men-in-suits wobbling around and falling on their faces. Did GODZILLA have this problem?

## SIMULTANEOUS DEVELOPMENT HELL

Hollywood seems to have a knack for coming up with multiple versions of the same basic idea, at the same basic time. A decade ago it was snake movies; remember VENOM, SPASMS, and JAWS OF SATAN? More recently there was the trio of underwater sci-fi films, THE ABYSS, DEEPSTAR FIVE and LORDS OF THE DEEP. Now, with a sequel already announced for Stuart Gordon's domestically unreleased prison of the future film, FORTRESS, no less than Gale Ann Hurd has announced PENAL COLONY, while Columbia/TriStar Home Video has plans to release PRISON PLANET. All futuristic prison pictures. Who says there are no good ideas in Hollywood? The only problem is

that they are all the same one.

## CARPENTER, CRAVEN... AND AGAR?

Wes Craven (busy with his new Freddy Krueger movie, his big-budget West Point ghost story and a project jokingly referred to as "HELLROSE PLACE") found time to do a cameo in an episode of John Carpenter's made-for-Showtime BODY BAGS. The same goes for the less-occupied John Agar, who forged a friendship with Carpenter several years ago when Carpenter wanted him for a major role in his (since aborted) CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON remake. Agar starred in 1952's CREATURE sequel, REVENGE OF THE CREATURE. "Carpenter's wife [Sandy King] called me about BODY BAGS, and I'm always happy to work," said the veteran actor. Meanwhile, Carpenter has moved on to another classic remake, VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED. Carpenter says the dilemma lies in "making a better story than the first one—which is a stretch because it was a pretty good movie." Carpenter is also involved in a New Line project called IN THE MOUTH OF MADNESS, which he describes as "one of the most inventive scripts I've read in years. Mike DeLuca wrote it and it's like nothing I've ever seen on the screen. It's the

closest to a true Lovecraft adaptation I've ever seen, even though it's not actually based on Lovecraft's stories.

## H. P. WHO?

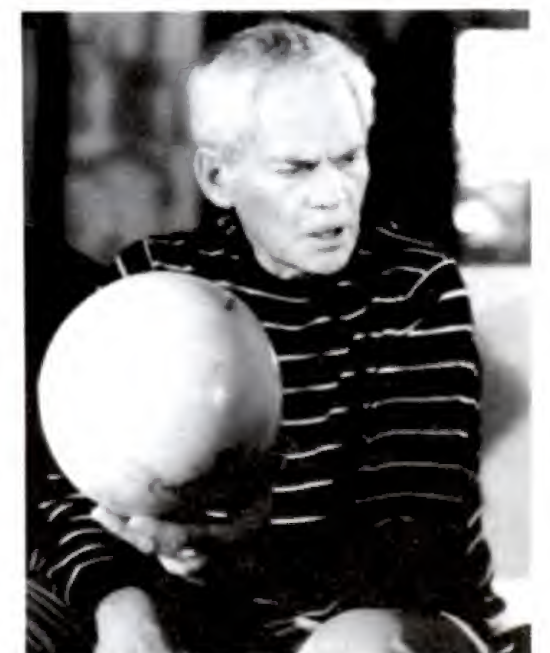
Speaking of not based on Lovecraft: Brian Yuzna is producing an anthology film which he describes as "inspired by Lovecraft." Yuzna directs one, Christopher Gans and Shusuke Kaneko handle the others. "We tried to do actual Lovecraft stories, but they just didn't translate to the screen," explained Yuzna. The result, H.P. LOVECRAFT'S NECRONOMICON will feature nothing based on actual Lovecraft stories. Great Cthulhu must be spinning in his tomb in the sunken city of R'lyeah.

## WE KNOW YOU DIDN'T ASK BUT

Lastly, we would respectfully submit that our sister publication erred slightly in Issue #3 by pegging EYES OF A STRANGLER as the *Femme Fatales* film of 1993. A more likely candidate, at least in terms of budget and boxoffice potential would surely be JURASSIC PARK. What femme fatales, you may say? Well, Michael Crichton's story posits that the dinosaur population is controlled by genetically engineering only femmes: as far as their being fatale—well, the body count speaks for itself.

Jay Stevenson

'50s genre icon, John Agar appears in John Carpenter's upcoming made-for-Showtime production BODY BAGS.



# KING B

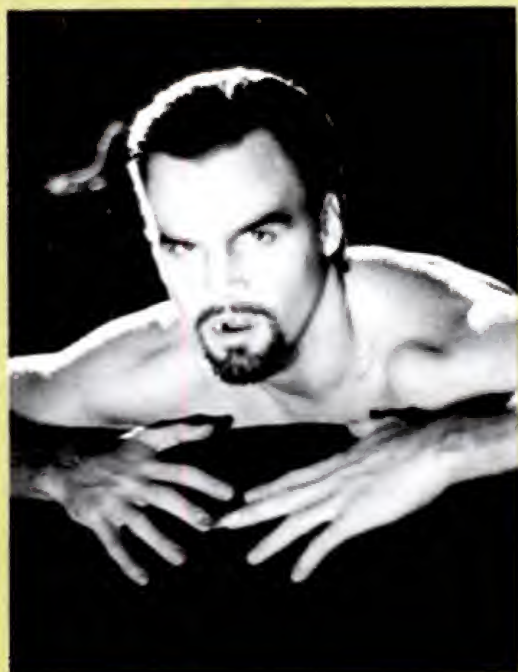
## Vampires, dinosaurs and comic heroes lead Roger Corman to new budget heights.

By Steve Biodrowski

Has the Full Moon risen over the New Horizon? Well, Charles Band may talk of Roger Corman in the past tense, but the truth is that Corman's Concorde/New Horizon out-produces Band's Full Moon at a rate of approximately two-to-one. And, though Corman produces a slightly broader spectrum of films, he continues to emphasize genre fare such as *TO SLEEP WITH A VAMPIRE*, *STEPMONSTER*, *DRACULA RISING*, *CARNOSAUR* and the recently completed *FANTASTIC FOUR*.

*TO SLEEP WITH A VAMPIRE* stars Scott Valentine (*MY DEMON LOVER*) and Charlie Spradling (Full Moon's *MERIDIAN* and *PUPPET MASTER II*, ironically enough) as vampire and intended victim engaged in a deadly one-

Vampires as Erotic Hunks. Doug Wert in *DRACULA RISING*, semi-companion to *FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND*.



"Living Legend" Roger Corman, now 67, directs John Hurt at the conclusion of Corman's *FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND*, his first directorial effort in 22 years.

night affair. In *STEPMONSTER*, with Alan Thicke, a young boy suspects—correctly, as it turns out—that his new stepmother is a monster. *DRACULA RISING*, which shot in Bulgaria last August, concerns an American art restorer (Stacy Travis), working in a Transylvanian monastery, who is transported back in time and meets the son of Vlad "The Impaler" Dracula. *CARNOSAUR*, scheduled for release this Spring, is from a novel by Harry Adam Knight (a pseudonym for British film critic John Brosnan and an anonymous co-author) about a genetic research scientist who recreates dinosaurs.

Part of Corman's strength over the years has been an uncanny ability to capitalize on

trends. While agreeing that horror is on the wane right now, he thinks a change may be coming. "The pendulum always swings back. That's not a perfect analogy, of course, it never swings back to exactly where it was, and a pendulum does. There's a trend away from excessive violence, especially in Europe, and, while we've done well with erotic thrillers, I think that market is about saturated."

Corman's current crop is an attempt to upgrade his product in response to an increasingly competitive market. "We've been successful with horror and fantasy films forever—well, 30 years," he proclaimed. "We now see that the market is still there, but it requires a somewhat bigger film. So we

upped our budgets to the \$2-4 million range."

Three or four million dollars may not sound like much by today's standards, but it's at least ten times what Corman spent at A.I.P. during the '50s and '60s. Today, however, no longer is the genre the exclusive province of independent filmmakers, and major studio productions have raised audience expectations. "You very seldom saw an expensive science fiction or horror film back then," explained Corman. "I think what's happened now is the audience has become so accustomed to special effects films with budgets from \$50 to \$100 million that you can't get away any more with a \$50,000 or even a \$100,000 special effects job. The audience simply will not accept them, so we've put more money into the special effects, into the artwork, into specialized props, and so forth."

With all this competition, what is the secret to longevity in a business that has seen the failure of many other independent producers? "There's no secret to it," Corman stated. "It's a combination of: (1) my staff and I work very hard, and (2) we try to remain creative and flexible and to move with the changes, both in the market and in technology. We're utilizing technical effects today that were undreamed of when I started. And I would assume that ten years from now, we will still be making these types of films and working with technology nobody is working with



A member of John Buechler's effects crew with the 20-foot animatronic beast from CARNOSAUR. A dinosaur cloning tale that beat JURASSIC PARK into the theatres.

today, and there will very possibly be new markets not available today."

Another change Corman has weathered is the trend toward forgoing theatrical distribution of small films without big-name stars. Full Moon, for example, is strictly a direct-to-video company. Said Corman, "I think that's because (Charlie Band's a friend of mine—he's a bright guy, and I think he does good work) he doesn't have his own distribution. Unless you control your own distribution, then you're giving it to somebody else—there are too many hands taking their share of the income, and theatrical distribution becomes too expensive. You have to do it yourself."

"We have our own distribution through Concorde," he continued. "All our films will get at least a limited theatrical release (100 to 200 dates), and CARNOSAUR and FANTASTIC FOUR will probably get an

even broader release... We will always be doing regional releases, moving from one region to another. Hitting the whole country on one night, you can end up spending from \$1-3 million on prints without even getting into the advertising."

What does Corman think of Band's other innovation, marketing the company label as a brand name for fantasy films?

While far removed from the BLUE LAGOON, Christopher Atkins' portrayal of Vlad the Impaler in DRACULA RISING still seems more surfer dude than Euro-vampire.



"I think that's a good idea, he said. "As a matter of fact, when I heard what he was doing, I thought maybe of having spin-off company names create sub-headings for a science-fiction line, a kick-boxing line, a horror line. We may still do that."

Speaking of limited theatrical release, what are Corman's feelings about 20th Century-Fox's handling of FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND? "I was a little disappointed," he admitted. "They hit all the major cities, but I thought it should have had a broader release. They told me they didn't expect it was going to get such good reviews: the *New York Times* compared me to Fellini and Kurosawa; Siskel and Ebert gave it an excellent review. It also proved very popular on video and cable, very close to the size audience of a major release."

As to whether he might soon direct again, Corman responded, "I have a couple of thoughts, but at the moment we have so much production, and our new home video company (New Horizons) is growing so fast, it's just taking too much of my time."

Under the circumstances, FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND II would seem unlikely; however, Corman pointed out, "DRACULA RISING is the sequel. There's similarity to the titles, and in both pictures a person travels back in time to meet Frankenstein or Dracula. We've definitely taken the route to follow up on the FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND concept." However, the film is not connected to Brian Aldiss' literary sequel, DRACULA UN-



TV sitcom actress Robin Riker (BROTHERS), as the titular character of Corman's kid-vid STEPMONSTER.

BOUND, which would have been too expensive. "I liked the novel, but it would have required at least the budget of FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND. DRACULA RISING had a slightly smaller budget, though it's still one of our more expensive films."

More noticeable to the average viewer will be the similarity between CARNOSAUR and Michael Crichton's JURASSIC PARK, currently receiving the big budget treatment from Steven Spielberg. Noted Corman, "The novel CARNOSAUR was written eight or nine years before JURASSIC PARK. I know Michael Crichton—he's a good guy. I don't think he took the idea from CARNOSAUR. It was probably an original with him, and he didn't even know that Harry Adam Knight had written a similar story."

CARNOSAUR'S obvious tie-in with Spielberg's highly anticipated JURASSIC PARK has brought it a lot of attention. However, Concorde's most notable '93 production wasn't even in the planning stages a few months ago, and essentially fell into Corman's all too capable hands.

When a German producer failed to raise his projected

continued on page 62

# RED DWARF

**Interstellar British lunacy invades U.S. shores.**

*By Dennis Fischer*

"This is an S.O.S. distress call from the mining ship RED DWARF. The crew is dead, killed by a radiation leak. The only survivors were Dave Lister, who was in suspended animation during the disaster, and his pregnant cat, who was safely sealed in the hold. Revived, 3 million years later, Lister's only companions are a life form that evolved from his cat, and Arnold Rimmer, a hologram simulation of one of the dead crew."



This opening serves to introduce early episodes of an irreverent, inventive and almost irresistible challenge to the pantheon of all-time great science fiction series. That program, seen only sporadically on various PBS stations, is the wild and wonderful RED DWARF.

What distinguished the great sci-fi series of the past, TWILIGHT ZONE, STAR TREK, OUTER LIMITS, THE PRISONER, and at times, DR. WHO, were their distinctive freshness, their willingness to break the boundaries of typical television fare. Most past science fiction comedies were either direct parodies, like QUARK, or silly gimmick shows, such as THE GREATEST AMERICAN HERO or IT'S ABOUT TIME.

RED DWARF is the bi-product of two talented writers, Rob Grant and Doug Naylor, and the rather unique British approach to television. A British comedy series is generally limited to only six shows a season. By doing this they are able to avoid the creative burn-out that has plagued even the best series of the past. While British TV budgets might be much lower, the freedoms from restriction are much greater. With an irreverent attitude and a bickering crew, RED DWARF is a breath of fresh air in the vacuum of the sometimes sanctimonious nobility of Gene Roddenberry's universe.

Grant and Naylor met in school at age nine, and while reading psychology at the same university, got the idea to create a sitcom. It didn't sell, but they continued writing, finally selling a Raymond Chandler parody sketch to a radio comedy se-

From the fifth season, "The Inquisitor," dedicated to eliminating useless people, which pretty much covers the entire RED DWARF crew.



THE RED DWARF's shuttlecraft, *The Starbug*. A third season addition that helped open up the series to more non-shipboard storylines.

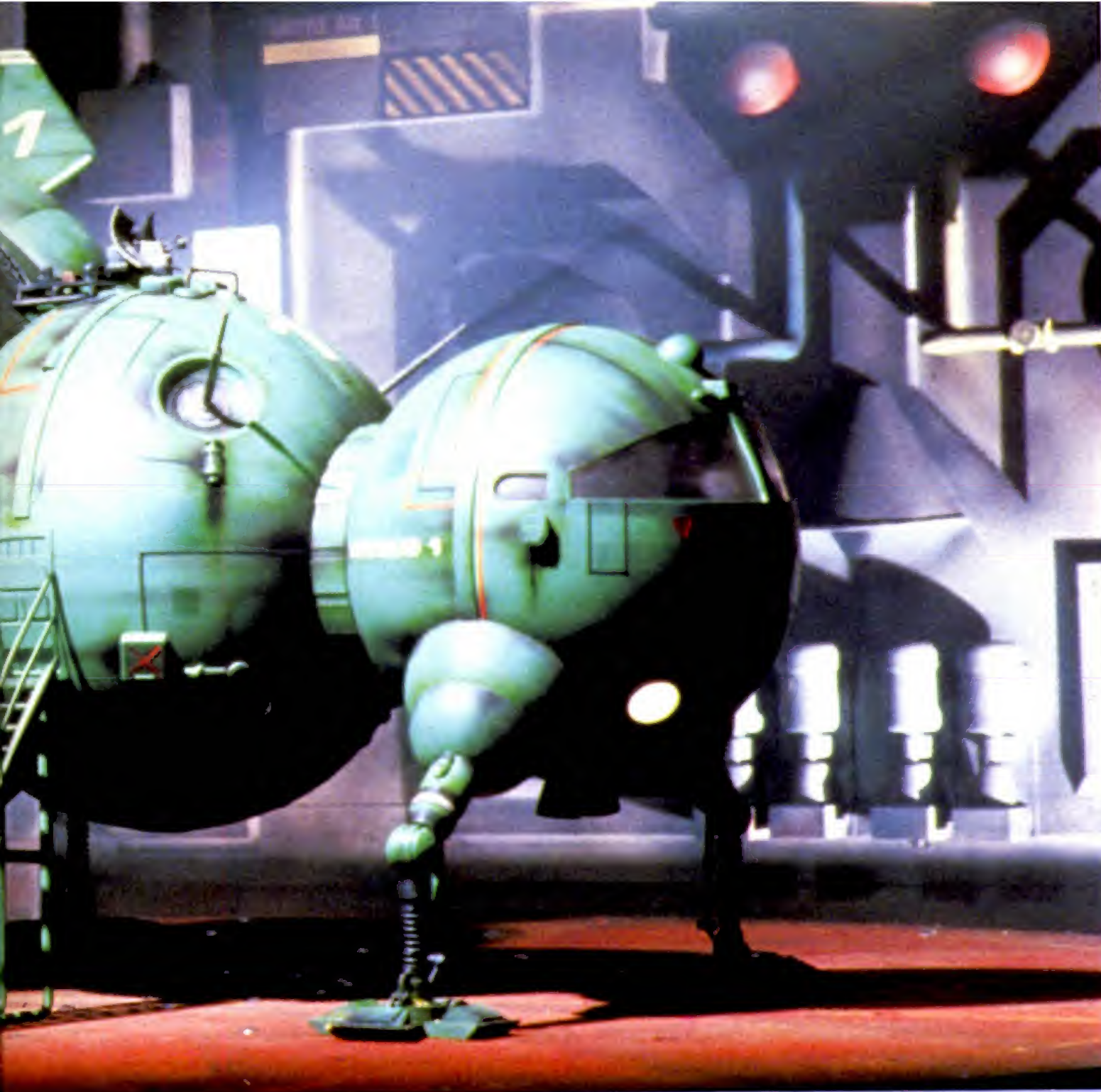
ries.

"RED DWARF came out of a sketch called 'Dave Holling: Space Cadet,' explained Naylor, "and that was just basically about a guy on a spaceship where everyone had been wiped out. It was just him, slowly going mad, talking to his computer. We did about eight of those in this sketch show, and it was really quite successful. We thought, hey, this would be terrific as our own project. There will be just one guy and a computer, and that's all there will be. There won't be any guest stars. We don't have anybody else. One guy, and a computer."

"Dumb," chimed in Grant. "Dumb," agreed Naylor. "Yes, it's very hard to get plots out of a guy and a computer. Very boring. So we thought, OK, we don't want another human, but we'll have anybody who's not a human, and we don't want to have an android. So, we thought, we'll have a hologram. We didn't want to have any aliens in it, to make it like, pretty much, all science fiction, because that's generally what you do when you do science fiction."

"We started a show called SPITTING IMAGE for John Lloyd and Paul Jackson, who were the top producers in the country at that time. After six weeks on it we





“‘Don’t worry,’ we told the BBC. ‘There won’t be any science fiction [in the show].’ Of course, if they leave you alone a bit...”

—Co-creator Doug Naylor—

and probably the worst example. That was the enduring joke really, a complete slob and wastrel! A ne’er-do-well, and the last living representative of the human race. It all came from that central point. We said, well, who’s going to be best to set sparks off with him, and we thought maybe a straight down the line, regulation issue-type guy, who happened to be dead. And neurotic.”

That was Rimmer, whom Grant described as “still an underachiever in his death, and that was the driving line. Then Cat was supposed to sort of reflect the idea of what he (Lister) thought humanity was. He was supposed to be a satirical edge character. He didn’t pan out that way, really, he was just a fun character.”

The idea behind Holly was to have a computer that, after three million years, had gone a bit senile. “The whole idea of that, was that he never really knew if he was really super brilliant, or whether he had actually lost all his marbles,” said Grant.

Dissatisfied with the first season of the show, Grant and Naylor began to make some changes. In the second season,

**THE RED DWARF’s** intrepid crew (l to r): Android Kryten, the ever-narcissistic Cat, the holographic Rimmer and “Every-slob,” Lister. The now-female Holly computer can be seen in upper left.

wrote the pilot for RED DWARF and Lloyd and Jackson really liked it. We thought we would be able to sell it in, like ten days, tops. It took three years,” recalled Naylor. “BBC turned it down three times,” added Grant.

While Grant and Naylor continued to work on SPITTING IMAGE, Paul Jackson gave up on trying to sell RED DWARF to the BBC in London and took a backdoor approach by taking it to the BBC in Manchester. It sold.

Unlike American series which begin with a pilot, RED DWARF began with a commitment for six episodes. “We didn’t want to make a pilot because we thought the BBC might find out and undo it. Basically, no one was quite up to speed and none of the sets were really finished. It was completely chaotic. We thought, we’ll bite the bullet and we’ll go with it, otherwise it was going to get cut. That’s why the first series is so rough,” said Naylor.

“When we first started,” continued Grant, “we thought it was going to be kind of a SANFORD AND SON in space. A conventional sitcom, but in space. We wrote our first proper science fiction plot about show four. It took us that long to realize it was a lot more fun doing time travel and that kind of stuff. Half of the first series was in the wrong direction.”

“But,” explained Naylor, “that was also one of the reasons Paul Jackson was

able to sell it, because no one wanted science fiction, and his selling point was, look, it isn’t science fiction, it’s just like a few guys that could be on a submarine, only it isn’t a submarine, it’s a spaceship. They went ‘Oh, right,’ and Paul went, ‘Don’t worry, there won’t be any science fiction in it.’ Of course, when they leave you alone a bit...”

Rob Grant explained that the show originated with Lister. “The idea was that he was the last human being left alive,



**“Our biggest enemy is going space crazy. The thing that keeps my slender grip on reality is my friendship with my singing potatoes.”**

—From the second season—

they decided to get off the ship a bit more and had some of the sets changed. “There is just a whole tradition, of a lot of British science fiction, to look awful, like the sets are going to fall down. That was the thing we wanted to avoid and, of course, the first series of DWARF was exactly that. One of the solutions was to get off the ship, and two was to get more solid-looking sets. Frankly, we didn’t really succeed,” said Naylor.

Third season changes were even more drastic with set updates and cast changes. The ship’s mentally deficient computer (previously portrayed by Norm Lovett) has performed a head change operation on itself in order to be replaced by Hattie Hayridge. The character Grant and Naylor had set out to avoid was incorporated when Robert Llewellyn joined the cast as

Trapped on a Psy-moon, all of Rimmer’s fears and neuroses (and there are plenty) are personified. This is one of the few pleasant ones.



Left to right: Chris Barrie (Rimmer), Hattie Hayridge (Holly), Craig Charles (Lister), Danny-John Jules (Cat) and Robert Llewellyn (Kryten). Not quite a Roddenberry-esque extended family image.

Kryten, described in a later episode as “the android version of Norman Bates.”

A new opening sequence, featuring a STAR WARS-style title crawl, that rolls by too fast to read, helped introduce these changes and tried to “explain” the wild plot inconsistencies that had developed from the series’ freewheeling scripts. For those lacking a single frame or slow motion feature on their VCRs, the opening reads as follows:

**RED DWARF III:  
THE SAGA CONTINUES**

The story so far...

Three million years in the future, Dave Lister, the last human being alive, discovers he is pregnant after a liaison with his female self in a parallel universe. His pregnancy concluded with the successful delivery of twin boys, Jim and Bexley. However, because the twins were conceived in another universe with different physical laws, they suffer from highly accelerated growth rates, and are both eighteen years old within three days of being born. In order to save their lives, Lister returns them to the universe of their origin, where they are reunited with their father (a woman) and are able to lead comparatively normal lives. Well, as normal as you can be if you’ve been born in a parallel universe and your mother’s a man and your father’s a woman and you’re eighteen three days after your birth. Shortly afterwards, Kryten, the service mechanoid who had left the ship after being rescued from his own crashed vessel, the *Nova 5*, is found in pieces after his space bike crashlands onto an asteroid. Lister rebuilds the ‘noid,’ but is unable to recapture his personality.

Meanwhile, Holly, the increasingly erratic RED DWARF computer, performs a head sex change operation on himself. He bases his new face on Holly, a female computer with whom he’d once fallen madly in love.

And now the saga continues...

**RED DWARF III, THE SAME GENERATION NEARLY...**

Whether it was the changes or simply a case of the audience finally finding the show, RED DWARF’s ratings finally took off with the third season, and the show’s popularity increased by leaps and bounds.

This new-found notoriety has given Grant and Naylor the opportunity to write two novels, *Red Dwarf* and *Better Than Life*, based on the series. Written under the pseudonym of Grant Naylor, the books have allowed the duo to alter and fill in further details of the main characters’ histories. Since the first season of the show was never repeated in Great Britain, and was not released to videotape, they felt



Kryten, described as the android Norman Bates. Llewellyn was also in the U.S. pilot.



Left: Series creators Rob Grant and Doug Naylor. Said Naylor of the show's origins, "We wanted to avoid the British science fiction tradition to look awful." Right: Craig Charles as Lister, the last human left alive 3,000,000 years in the future and a loveable slob, playing the cliches of the genre for broad laughs.

this allowed them greater freedom in altering the backstory of the project. Commented Naylor, "It drove a lot of people nuts because there were so many inconsistencies...It convinced us that it's different parallel universes, not just bad writing."

Like any television show RED DWARF's cast is a crucial part of its success. "The primary drive when we went into casting," explained Grant, "was that we preferred to get real actors—Royal Shakespeare Company, if possible. We wanted to sell this idea with great character actors. We wound up with an impressionist (Chris Barrie as Rimmer) a

stand-up comedian, (Craig Charles as Lister) and a dancer (Danny John-Jules as Cat). I don't know how that happened, they just seemed the best people for it. We'd known Chris (Barrie) from the radio show SON OF CLICHE (where "Dave Holling: Space Cadet" had originated) and Craig (Charles) actually read the script to let us know if he felt people might think it was racist because Cat was black. He said 'No...Are there any other parts? I quite fancy auditioning for this,' we told him we didn't think he'd make a good Cat and he said 'No, Lister.'"

Similar reverse casting occurred when Norman Lovett auditioned for Rimmer and

ended up being cast as Holly, the computer. "Originally, Holly was off screen, but Norman was a bit of a moaner. He said 'You're wasting my assets. Put me on the screen.' so we backtracked and put him in vision. The character was fairly straight as well, simply a device to get over the factual and science fictional information, but it wasn't long before Holly became a twisted character in its own right."

Producer Paul Jackson saw Robert Llewellyn in the play NAMMON, ROBOT BORN OF WOMAN. The decision to do a Canadian accent for the android character was Llewellyn's in a desire to get away

## American Pilot Fails to Reach Orbit

By Dennis Fischer

While the opening and plot ape the first episode of the classic British series, the American RED DWARF pilot consistently lacks the edge, humor or appeal of the British series. In fact, the only thing that really works in it is Robert Llewellyn, reprising his role of Kryten, the ever anxious android.

To accommodate space for commercials the pilot has been trimmed, to its detriment, and characters are not nearly as well fleshed out or established. Humor that developer, writer and executive producer Linwood Boomer felt was too British, has been replaced with cruder gags written "down" to the industry perception of the American audience. In the original series Rimmer compares death to

being on holiday with German businessmen. In the U.S. pilot this becomes "death is like being in an Amish bachelor party." You can almost hear the rim shot.

Offering effects recycled from the original and a dull Todd Rundgren theme, the pilot opens with the Holly 6000 computer (Jane Leeves) giving an orientation tour of the ship's mall, bowling alley and football field. The presence of holograms of deceased crew members is introduced to explain that "Death is not the career set back it used to be." Oddly, the characteristic "H" on the forehead, that denoted holograms on the British series, has been replaced by a glowing red dot that prompted one original series wit to dub them "Ghandi in space."

The American pilot's biggest downfall is probably in the casting of Craig Bierko

as Lister. Far too handsome to be credible as a slovenly screw-up, the character is obviously still meant to be a loser ("I started out with nothing—and I couldn't hang on to it.") Instead of an earthy character turn, Bierko plays him as a charismatic leading man, missing the grungy plebian charm of Craig Charles entirely.

Similarly Chris Eigeman can't compete with Chris Barrie's original Rimmer, and Hinton Battle, though physically similar to Danny Jules in the role of Cat, lacks the outrageous flair and James Brown squeals of self-appreciation that brought the character to life. Instead we are treated to bits of business with string and the spraying of possessions with an aerosol spray.

Overall, the timing and the characters

continued on page 62

## THE "BEST" OF RED DWARF

### Ratings are as follows:

- \* Not to worry, there aren't any.
- \*\* Worth your time to find and watch.
- \*\*\* Worth sitting through a PBS fundraiser to see.
- \*\*\*\* Worth selling your autographed S.T.N.G. toothbrush to see.

Regular cast: Chris Barris (Rimmer), Craig Charles (Lister), Danny John-Jule, (Cat), Norman Lovett (Holly). All episodes written by Rob Grant and Doug Naylor: all episodes produced and directed by Ed Bye. Third season produced by Grant and Naylor with Mattie Haybridge as Holly.



The show's new opening logo. Courtesy of an enlarged budget and an eager and experienced effects team.

### First Season

"We have been traveling through the galaxy for three million years. We have discovered many things: the highest form of life is man, the lowest, is a man who works for the post office."

#### THE END ★★

Like the first episodes of many series, this one suffers from too much time spent setting up the situation and introducing the characters and their relationships, rather than getting maximum laughs. Still, it's a clever concept which introduces us to the irreverent insult humor that serves the series so well.

#### FUTURE ECHOES ★★1/2

Lister prepares to spend the journey back to Earth in stasis with Cat. But when the space ship breaks the light barrier we are treated to time warp visions of the future including Lister as an old man, and his meeting his future sons. This one is notable for the Artificial Intelligence Toaster (John Lenahan) who sings "Fly Me to the Moon" in between offers of preparing toast.

#### WAITING FOR GOD ★★★

A daring but very funny episode on the dangers of fanaticism and belief. Lister finds an old cat church and becomes preoccupied with the history of the nearly extinct feline species. He is delighted to learn that he is their God, they revere him as "Cloister The Stupid," and that their vision of heaven is based on his dream of operating a fast food stand on Fiji.

### Second Season

"As the days go by, we face the inevitability that we are alone in a godless, uninhabited, hostile and meaningless universe. Still, you got to laugh, haven't you?"

#### KRYTEN ★★★1/2

The crew receives a distress call from the *Nova 5*, a ship with an all-female crew. After spiffing themselves up, even Holly appears on screen with a hairpiece, they are disappointed to find that all are dead on the *Nova 5*, except for an android, Kryten. Fussbudget David Ross portrays Kryten as a quiet domestic servant who spends time watching insipid ANDROIDS soap operas. Lister helps break the robot's submissive nature by showing him THE WILD ONE, EASY RIDER and REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE. Kryten eventually decks himself out like Brando and rockets off on a star trike.

#### BETTER THAN LIFE ★★★★★

One of the funniest and most imaginative episodes in the series finds everyone under the influence of a new computer game, "Better Than Life," which plugs into the brain and allows the users to experience their fantasies. Rimmer's morbid imagination causes the game to backfire and helps open up his character a bit more as we learn of his disapproving father, his admiration for Napoleon, (as his favorite fascist dictator) and other reasons for his overbearing officiousness.

#### STASIS LEAK ★★★1/2

A wildly off balance episode that leaps throughout time. Beginning before the accident, 3 million years ago, Rimmer is suffering hallucinations from a fungus Lister brought on board and thus ignores the disaster warnings offered to him by himself, courtesy of a stasis leak in the "present" which allows the crew member to move through time. Lister even gets to visit his own honeymoon suite when he "leaps" back to a past that never happened and marries fellow crewmember Kochanski. The characters are kept off balance the entire episode, as well as planting hints for future episodes.

### Third Season

"I toast...therefore...I am"  
—the artificial intelligence toaster.

#### BACKWARDS ★★★★★

After opening with a philosophical discussion between Cat and Lister over whether Wilma Flintstone or Betty Rubble is the sexier, this hilarious entry quickly propels the cast through a time hole to an alternate 20th century where everything works backwards. Brilliant trick photography and ingenious stunts highlight this

An amused Cat observes Kryten's mastery of non-verbal communication. (David Ross plays Kryten in this early episode.)



Holly, the senile computer, whose nighttime appearance gives new meaning to the phrase "computer down time."

episode, with the final reaction shot of Cat going to the bathroom on the backwards world, a genuine classic.

#### PARALLEL UNIVERSE ★★★★★

Designed to return them to Earth in seconds, Holly's new propulsion system, the "Holly-Hop," takes the crew into a parallel universe instead. There they find a duplicate *Red Dwarf* with an all female crew. Holly's distaff counterpart is introduced here and assumes the role for all subsequent episodes. Lister gets drunk and wakes up in bed with his female alter ego. Upon returning to the ship Lister discovers that things work differently in this universe and that he is pregnant. Also features Cat's music video, "Tongue Tied."

#### POLYMORPH ★★★1/2

An ALIEN parody show with a chameleonic genetic mutant that feeds off strong emotions rather than eating its prey, draining away Lister's fear, Cat's vanity, Kryten's guilt and Rimmer's anger, which it does in the guise of his mother. The alien effects are surprisingly good for a low-budget BBC show and the cast and viewer have fun seeing very different versions of the shows' characters.

#### TIMESLIDES ★★★1/2

Kryten discovers some mutated developing fluid which prints photographs the crew can walk into. Lister steps into a photo with Hitler to steal his briefcase, (containing fuzzy handcuffs, a diary and a bomb.) Kryten suggests going to the grassy knoll in Dallas, November 1963, and yelling "Duck!" Rimmer tries to make himself rich by stepping into a photo of his younger self to give himself info, the "tension sheet," a fabulously successful invention. Instead the actual inventor overhears Rimmer while his youthful counterpart ignores him.

### Fourth Season

"I am Holly, the ship's computer, with an I.Q. of 6000...the same as that of 6000 P.E. teachers."

#### D.N.A. ★★★

The crew encounters an unidentified craft with a machine that can transform any living thing into any other. Naturally, they activate it, and, after Lister changes from chicken to hamster then to human again, it makes Kryten human. Kryten has many questions for Lister, such as why his nipples don't work. Later he gets an erection when he sees an electric vacuum cleaner.

#### JUSTICE ★★★1/2

On Justice World, an abandoned penal colony equipped with a "justice field," the crew finds themselves faced with true, innate justice where the consequences of a crime are inflicted on its

perpetrator. Rimmer is charged with 1,167 counts of second-degree murder for his part in the *Red Dwarf* disaster. Kryten tries to get him off by proving him incompetent, but the vain Rimmer objects himself. Eventually leads to a total slapstick battle.

#### DIMENSION JUMP ★★★★★

In another parallel universe story we meet a different Arnold Rimmer, a brave, charming, popular and modest test pilot known to his friends as "Ace." Unfortunately, his test craft collides with the *Red Dwarf* and his positive self-image is forever clouded by the knowledge of the sad and worthless Rimmer that inhabits another universe.

### Fifth Season

**"The most interesting recent event was Lister pretending to pass the chef's exam, although he failed. That gives you some idea of how truly exciting some days can be around here."**

#### HOLOSHIP ★★★

Beamed aboard the holoship *Enlightenment*, Rimmer finds that its standard operating procedures include guilt-free sex, twice a day. "More than some people manage to squeeze into a lifetime," says Rimmer. To qualify for what seems a dream assignment, the ever incompetent Rimmer must face off with another holoship crew member in a life or death competition. With his ultimate fantasy seemingly at hand, Rimmer is dismayed to find



Rimmer subjected to a Helen Shapiro hairdo by an unusually jestful Holly (Norman Lovett), the shipboard computer.

himself in love with his opponent, and forced to choose between her life or his own.

#### THE INQUISITOR ★★★

The Inquisitor judges people who have led useless lives and replaces them with people who never got the chance to live. The *Red Dwarf* crew are obvious candidates for his judgment. The mad mechanoid, who can change the fabric of time and space, decides to eliminate Kryten and Lister. To save themselves, the duo steal the Inquisitor's time gauntlet and embark on another of the series' popular time/dimension travel stories.

#### BACK TO REALITY ★★★1/2

Fifth season finale, and one of the show's wildest entries. Essentially a twist on the concept of virtual reality, this episode finds the cast isn't the crew of the *Red Dwarf* at all, but four people who have been playing an incredibly realistic game. Or are they?

A particularly fun moment comes when Lister watches others playing the game and sees a RED DWARF adventure played out with a totally different cast and characters.

**"In the 3 million years we've been away I hope man has abolished war, disease and the saloon doors you get in trendy clothes shops."**

—From the first season—

from standard English voiced androids such as C-3PO from STAR WARS.

Limiting the number of shows per year has helped keep the quality up on RED DWARF. "We actually assign ourselves something like three months to write six shows. Of course, by the time we're through preproduction and rehearsals there is always a lot of rewriting," said Grant.

Preproduction takes about four weeks on the average, and the filming of each episode is spread over a couple of weeks, with three or four weeks for post-production. It adds up to a total of 20 weeks for all six shows. Roughly half the time that U.S. series spend to produce four times as many episodes.

"The greatest challenge," explained Naylor, "is for people to say, constantly, that they are surprised at the series, and that it's moving forward and not repeating itself. It's becoming better...and stranger."

"We also desperately try to avoid any conventional sitcom devices—the bet plot or the someone's forgotten my birthday plot," Grant added.

As the series has progressed, the special effects have become increasingly more ambitious, expanding from the initial library shots of the *Red Dwarf*. Stock shots are flipped and enlarged to give them a new appearance as new effects shots are being scripted and added.

By the fifth season, the humor almost seems supplanted by the elaborateness of the effects, though the effects budget has remained largely the same.

"We can do very specific effects and people who have seen the show want to work on it," said Naylor.

"They're great," chimed in Grant. "A tradition, now officially at the start of the writing process for each series, is to invite all the guys at the special effects department to go out for a massive drinking session. They all throw ideas at what we can do now. They are completely dedicated to the show—they love it and they love the challenge."

While the pair would like to make a RED DWARF movie, they feel that the financing for this must come from American sources. "The big problem, really, with



The series' penchant for depicting the flipside of characters is exemplified with the evil Rimmer and Cat from fifth seasons "Demons and Angels."

the British cinema industry is that you can only recoup so much money from the cinemas over here. The movies tend to be low budget and then recoup, by good fortune, on the international market," explained Grant.

The pair has been involved in writing and producing the pilot for an American version of the series which was shot by Universal Television for NBC. The 22-minute pilot is based on the initial episode of the original series. A major concern for the series creators is that American television requires as many episodes for one season as four seasons of the British production.

Meanwhile, the British series is slowly developing an international following as distribution of episodes and word of its worth spread. While it seems unlikely to generate the kind of hysteria associated with STAR TREK, the series has climbed to the top of the ratings on BBC 2, and does have the large marketing potential attractive to American business and consumers. Try to picture pull-string talking Kryten dolls and Cat costume kits.

The busy team of Grant and Naylor is currently exploring other possibilities, including a comic TWILIGHT ZONE-type series for the BBC and THURSDAY MAN, a film project initially developed for Walter Matthau. The film would be set in London after an ecological disaster in the U.S. has displaced millions of people to England. In order to control the population's movements, people are only allowed out of their houses one day a week. The protagonist of the story is only allowed out on Thursdays, hence the title. Grant and Naylor hope that the project will go into production soon. □

# Stephen King's

# THE STAND

Apocalyptic epic becomes small-screen miniseries

By Michael Beeler

THE STAND, from its very beginning, has been Stephen King's "own little Vietnam." The original endless 1200-page manuscript, the two versions of the book, the numerous screenplays, the abandoned feature film project with Warner Bros, and finally the beginning of production of the eight-hour miniseries for ABC television are a testament to the creative determination that was initially inspired by a Midwestern, Bible-thumping radio preacher's proclamation that, "Once in every generation the plague will fall among them."

"There were times when I actively hated THE STAND," King wrote in *Danse Macabre*, "but there was never a time when I did not feel compelled to go on with it."

Principal photography for the production of THE STAND began in Salt Lake City, Utah during mid-February of this year. The over 400-page screenplay written by King himself is being produced by Laurel Entertainment Productions, a subsidiary of Spelling Entertainment Group, Inc., with King and Richard Rubinstein serving as executive producers. Directing the five months of scheduled filming in Salt Lake City, Las Vegas and possibly Pittsburgh is Mick Garris, who also directed King's first original screenplay SLEEPWALKERS.

"Mick and Steve had a very good experience in terms of SLEEPWALKERS," said Rubinstein. "Steve felt creatively Mick was in sync with what he wanted to



King (l), Laurel Entertainment executive producer Richard Rubinstein and director Mick Garris on Utah locations. ABC has postponed airing until February or May 1994.

do in terms of seeing the screenplay adapted. I was comfortable with that and thought it was a great marriage with Mick's wonderful visual style and Steve's words. We also had the fortune to be able to make arrangements with a cast of people who can really act."

Heading the cast of this epic miniseries, which has over 120 speaking roles, is Gary Sinise as steadfast Stu Redman, Molly Ringwald as pregnant Frannie Goldsmith, Rob Lowe as deaf mute Nick Andros, Jamey Sheridan as the faceless walking man Randall Flagg, Laura San Giacomo as Nadine and Ruby Dee as the purity of spirit Mother Abigail. Planned for a November sweeps week airing, it will be the first new eight-hour miniseries on television since the highly acclaimed production of LONESOME DOVE.

"The production is going along extraordinarily well from my perspective," said

Rubinstein, who also produced King's first produced theatrical screenplay, CREEPSHOW in 1982 and his first theatrical adaptation of one of his own best-selling novels, PET SEMATARY IN 1989. "I think Steve would probably share that sentiment. We're meeting people who effectively I've been waiting to meet for 13 years, which is going back to the summer of 1979 when Steve and I decided that we'd like to be involved together in realizing THE STAND. It was a movie at that point—a feature film. We tried for a very long time to find a way to squeeze that story effectively into roughly a two-hour format, without much

success. Rospo Pallenberg wrote a script that got the plot down to the running time we needed. But I don't think that Rospo or anybody else, including Steve himself, could get the characters in as well."

The story of *The Stand*, King's best-selling novel of all time, is quite simply about germs. The literal biological kind that are accidentally released by a Defense Department laboratory as a deadly superflu on an unsuspecting world caught in the daily mundane grind of living. The symbolically evil kind that fester in a person's soul when they are subjected to the disconcerted stares and catcalls of prejudice. And the spiritually redeeming kind that grow and flourish in the hearts and minds of men and women of good will.

It is very much a modern version of *The Lord of the Flies*. A textbook course in the failings and triumphs of the human endeavor. Sure to be required reading for all

US ARMY  
10B67356



King and Rubinstein on a frosty-February-in-Utah location for the 8-hour ABC miniseries. (Right) The 25th anniversary edition of King's classic, *The Stand*. Shortened at the publisher's request, now returned to King's original length.

college prep 11th graders in the year 2034. "Psst—hey, Willie—check out page 587!"

Abandoned in the empty towns and cities of a post-epidemic world filled with carnage and massive auto wrecks, the survivors, stunned in their isolation, are slow to react to their changed environment. Evil, on the other hand, as personified by the worn heels of the walking man Randall Flagg, who has appeared in a number of other King novels, is constantly moving. Well aware of the golden opportunity that has been laid at his feet in the form of a world filled with the unguarded toys of modern destruction.

As in *The Lord of the Flies*, two distinct camps are soon formed by the survivors. One in Boulder, Colorado, which is at first somewhat unorganized and centered around a 108-year-old Black woman called Mother Abigail, who, although fragile in stature, is an unswerving beacon of good. And another in Las Vegas, which is

a well-run, highly efficient, totalitarian regime driven by the cold-hearted, satanic "king of nowhere," Randall Flagg.

The ensuing confrontation is the age-old battle between good and evil. It is riveting. Classic King at his very best. It is also very long, over 1,100 pages and, although every page is essential in the telling of this story, they present dynamics that cannot be ignored in transferring it from one medium to another.

"There's no way you can literally take every incident, every hot point in the book and translate them in a one-to-one ratio to the screen," said Rubinstein. "I don't think it would be successful in terms of creating something the audience would want to see because the mediums have different requirements and sometimes use different ways to make a point. Sometimes all you need is a visual to convey on film what took Steve several pages in the book. I'm being simplistic about it, but that's the

**“There were times when I actively hated THE STAND, but there was never a time when I didn't feel compelled to go on with it.”**

*Stephen King  
from Danse Macabre*

concept.”

Earlier proposals to turn the book into a TV miniseries were rejected. But after countless attempts by both King and Pallenberg failed to produce a useable feature-length script, it became clear that maybe a miniseries was the only place where the story could be told effectively. “I think the stories you can tell on television, and how to tell them in terms of social context, has expanded over the years substantially,” said Rubinstein. “It has solved the problem of trying to condense a book that's more than a thousand pages, into a two-and-a-half-hour movie. We now have the opportunity with an eight-hour miniseries—which when you take away the commercials is a six-and-a-

half-hour movie—to respect both the plot and the characters.”

The three-act feature approach suggested by Pallenberg's script, has been dropped and replaced with a format that more closely follows the rhythm of the book. “The fact is that miniseries, television commercials and the ribbons that go with that are very akin to the chapters of the book,” added Rubinstein. “So rhythmically the mini-

series format can be very appropriate for a long novel.”

Interior shots are being done at sound stages in Salt Lake City that were used in the '70s to produce THE DONNY AND MARIE OSMOND SHOW. Special effects are being produced by XFX, Inc. in Sun Valley, California under the supervision of Steve Johnston.

Garris, who is well known for his use of cameo appearances in his films, will have a number in this production. Although he is not releasing the names of those who will appear in the miniseries at the moment, it is widely known that King will play the part of Teddy Weizak.

The budget numbers are also not being released, however, Rubinstein has indicated that although it is a substantial

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# Stephen King's

# NEEDFUL THINGS

The son of Moses directs King's retailer from Hell.



Veteran actor Max von Sydow



Director Fraser Heston (l) and director of photography, Tony Westman, on a scenic Canadian exterior for *NEEDFUL THINGS*.

*By Kenneth Winikoff*

For a relationship that was never actually put into writing, Stephen King and Castle Rock Entertainment have done pretty well by each other. The independent film company, which has a distribution deal with Columbia Pictures, has reaped success from its productions of two King stories—*STAND BY ME*, directed by Castle Rock co-owner Rob Reiner, and the academy Award-winning *MISERY*. With this batting average, it's no wonder that hopes are high for this month's release of *NEEDFUL THINGS*, the final story set in Castle Rock, Maine, the town that has provided the inspiration for King tales dating back to *CUJO*.

"We have no formal relationship with Stephen except that he thinks we do a good job with material," said Martin Shafer, one of the partners in the six-year-old production company. "We read *NEEDFUL THINGS* and loved the story. What appealed to us particularly was the humor involved." He said the characters were portrayed with emphasis on the psychological

aspects of the story, the blood level, he said, is "deliberately kept low."

Which is not to say that there is a paucity of fear in the small New England town where King once again sets his sights on an eccentric citizenry. Yet it's not a descent into terror but a "classic piece of entertainment" according to director Fraser Heston. Heston, son of the legendary actor Charlton, is philosophical about the story. "The things we choose to bring into our lives do exert a certain influence over us. In this film, these things exert a powerful, malevolent influence that would provide a challenge to virtually anyone."

*NEEDFUL THINGS* is the tale of a small town and how an elderly shopkeeper who sets up his business changes the lives of everyone who visits his antique store. Max von Sydow stars as Leland Gaunt, the seemingly kind curio king whose arrival in Castle Rock is shrouded in mystery. It is not until he opens for business that his true mission becomes known. Gaunt is merely a simple man of commerce, as he repeatedly tells his customers.





Director Heston offers atmosphere worthy of von Sydow's European origins.

What he sells are the "needful things" the people of Castle Rock so desperately want. But he accepts neither checks nor American Express as payment: he gets something much more important—a favor, if you will, that will contribute to the complete breakdown of law and order. For young Brian Rusk (Shane Meier), something as innocuous as a trading card from Gaunt's curious curio shop turns into a dream fulfilled of receiving recognition from his baseball hero. For Brian's mother, Cora (Lisa Blount), it's a pair of sunglasses through which she sees a passionate sexual encounter with none other than the King himself, Elvis Presley. For Sally Chalmers, who owns a knitting store, the grandfatherly Gaunt has exactly what she needs, a cure for the painful crippling arthritic condition that has virtually disabled her. For town sheriff, Alan Pangborn, who came to Castle Rock carrying an unbearable load of emotional baggage, Gaunt personifies a perplexing problem. Although seemingly innocent and benevolent, there is something sinister behind those eyes of

Gaunt's that are always changing color. As his business picks up and his customers recede further and further behind their own private passions, something very troubling begins tearing the town apart. Eccentric but essentially harmless people are turning violent. Soon it becomes clear that Gaunt's enterprise has exacted a toll of chaos and death that can only be measured in apocalyptic terms. And the horror will not stop at Castle Rock's town limits. As the people of Castle Rock set upon each other with guns and

An idyllic Castle Rock moment for Pangborn and girlfriend Polly Chalmers (Bonnie Bedelia) before Gaunt's influence is felt on the town.



**“I love doing frightening things. There’s something cathartic about having the shit scared out of you. It’s not always what happens, but fear of what may happen.”**

knives, it falls to Pangborn to get to the bottom of this skull-duggery and send the devil on his way—that is, unless he slips and succumbs to his own personal demons first.

When Fraser Heston got the call from Martin Shafer at Castle Rock last July, he was in the midst of shooting a documentary featuring his father for the Arts and Entertainment cable network. He didn't have to think long before giving Shafer his answer. The two had previously worked together, and he knew of Castle Rock's success with King properties. "They offered me the job. I said, 'Of course.' At that time, the project had already been in motion with Peter Yates (*BREAKING AWAY*) set. According to Heston it was a question of Peter deciding he didn't want to do it." After some script tinkering by Castle Rock executives, including Rob Reiner, who Heston considers "one of the best directors alive," W. D. Richter (*THE ADVENTURES OF BUCKAROO BANZAI*) was called in to complete the rewrite.

Although he said he wasn't a particular fan of the horror genre, Heston has read some H.P. Lovecraft and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, as well as "things

on the mystery side—Conan Doyle, Robert Louis Stevenson." As far as movies, he said, "I liked *DEAD AGAIN* and *CANDYMAN*. I tend to like tales that are based on really good storytelling, stories that have firm characters that you really get into, characters that you really care about. And it's not easy to find those stories. Today I was in the editing room looking at a scene that I particularly liked. And I thought why is it that I liked this scene? It's really because of Stephen. You've got a script here that's based on the work of a master storyteller, one of the best storytellers of our era."

While Heston does appreciate a good story and a good film, he feels that Francis Ford Coppola's version of *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*, though a hit, missed the mark by a mile. "I was disappointed. The effects were wonderful—but they lost the story. I think that's the filmmaker's first job—to tell a story. The effects have to come second."

Which is not to say Heston doesn't intend to scare his audience with a gallon or two of blood. "I love doing frightening things. There's something cathartic about having the shit scared out of you." And that's something he certainly intends to do in *NEEDFUL THINGS*. But it's not shock for pure shock value. "You know, in Stanley Kubrick's *THE SHINING*, very little happens in that film until the very end when Jack Nicholson comes back with the axe. And there's only one murder in the film and it's over in seconds and it's not a big deal. But, by God, Kubrick's got you on the edge of your chair. You're going nuts. Every time he cuts to a simple shot of the hotel, you just know something horrible is going to happen. And that's when Stephen is at his best—



The explosive finish of Gaunt's Needful Things shop! Special effects man Gary Paller spent two months preparing for the 2.5-second explosion. Nine separate small blasts create the illusion of one large one so that virtually no damage would be done to the converted Canadian feed store that doubles for the shop. Below: Paller's crew strings a mix of naphthalene crystals and black powder to set up the explosion from the inside.



when he keeps you going and you're going crazy—when, ostensibly, as you look at any given scene out of context, nothing much is going on but in the context of the whole story and the characters and where they are, and what's about to happen, it's pretty damned frightening."

Director of photography Tony Westman (TREASURE

ISLAND) agrees that the film will rely heavily on emotional value, as opposed to shock value. "It's a dark movie, more of a character piece. We rely on the character, the turn of the screw," he said. The flavor is established early in the film, in fact, during the opening credits which appear against an aerial shot of Castle Rock. As the sequence progresses,

the pace speeds up. "You don't know what's going on but it's going on mighty fast." The pace continues through the use of the camera. "Rarely does the camera stop. It's always on the move. We try to keep things slightly off center to break up the staticness."

Westman said that there were very few wide shots used. "It's very intense, very

focused. We used the dolly a lot to create a sense of claustrophobia." He reserved the extreme closeups for Gaunt, using a 20mm lens with which he shot von Sydow in a "Dutch angle," capturing his image somewhat off-tilt. A flashback sequence involving Gaunt was shot in sync at eight frames per second and then printed at 24 frames. This, he explained, created a streaking effect. Another scene in which Polly Chalmers' friend Nettie Cobb (Amanda Plummer) reflected back on her life with her abusive husband, was shot at eight frames and then multiple-printed. The result, he said, was "an enormously violent scene. But it creates an emotional effect."

With regard to the sets, he said, "We tried to keep the magic to the point where you don't see it. We used a lot of smoke, which created endless

Sheriff Pangborn and Deputy Ridgewick (Harris and Ray McKinnon, doing their own stunts) leap from the explosion.



A half-smiling Harris, with McKinnon, after the stunt. Inset: Effects supervisor Gary Paller hands out safety equipment to the crew prior to the destruction of Gaunt's Needful Things shop.



yards of mood. We used a lot of fire light." For this production, he noted that his crew came up with something he called the electroluminescent flagration device, which basically combined an electric lamp and a fire source. The effect parrots the natural light as much as possible but it makes it appear more stable to the camera's continually shutting and opening eye. "We also used mirrors to throw shafts of sunlight round. My gaffer is a master at using mirrors," which he noted can be used to beam light into areas that would not normally be lightable. While this keen attention to detail will probably pass over the heads of most moviegoers, as Westman said, "God is in the details."

Filming took place during six weeks last fall in the coastal town of Gibsons, British Columbia, a 40-minute ferry ride northwest of Vancouver. Director Heston was familiar with the picturesque, rocky Pacific coast, having sailed there years before. His wife, Marilyn, who was unit publicist on the project, hails from Vancouver.

Having arrived in Gibsons, production designer Doug Higgins' (SERPICO, DOG DAY AFTERNOON) crew set out to work building two structures—the town church and Leland Gaunt's Needful Things store—that would both be blown up during the filming. The construction crew did a good job—too good, in fact. The church was constructed with sturdy two-by-fours to withstand the wet, windy storms that blow in from the Pacific but it was built so soundly, it appeared that when it came time to blow it up, it wouldn't collapse on cue. So once the building was up, the workers had to go back in and cut stress points into the structure's frame substantially, and build a hinge into the steeple so that it would fold over on itself and tumble, point down, into the ground. "That was a challenge," laughed special effects man Gary Paller (FRIDAY THE 13TH, PART 8). "It took two weeks to prepare for a 2-1/2 second explosion." His crew, ranging from two to 20

**“They didn't want to do a metamorphosis of von Sydow. He was capable of an expression of terror without adding latex to his features. He does well with just his face.”**



Gaunt lures young Brian Rusk by offering the boy his "Needful Thing." A rare baseball card. Gaunt's payment is yet to come.

at various times of the shoot, set up shop in a circus tent.

The church explosion, coming near the climax of the film, is key to understanding the chaos that overtakes Castle Rock. One of the subplots involves a dispute between the Catholic and Baptist congregations over the Catholics' promotion of a Casino Night, the proceeds of which will go toward fixing the roof on their Lady of Serene Waters Church. The Baptists object. The Catholics, on the other hand, see no harm in a little gambling for a good purpose. In any other town, this would be a mild disagreement. But remember, this is Castle Rock.

**B**uilding the Needful Things store was, by comparison, simple. But blowing it up would prove to be more difficult as it was constructed not on a backlot but right in the center of Gibsons. Here, additional attention was paid to controlling the explosion so that adjoining buildings would not be affected. In another explosion, the script

called for a fireball reaching some 20 feet out into the street. Meanwhile, the building itself had to sustain only minimal damage since it was being leased from the owner. First, all the plate glass was removed and replaced with tempered glass, which tends to shatter into tiny, less dangerous fragments. Then the crew strung black powder and naphthalene crystals, commonly referred to as a "salt-and-pepper mix" throughout the building. All of this was done to set off nine separate explosions that would look like just one on screen. "In film, we talk in terms of multi-seconds," said Paller. "But the camera talks in terms of seconds." Moving 200 board feet of lumber 50 feet or more through the air in 2 1/2 seconds is a major task.

He said he conferred with director Heston each day about the effects. "I had to try to crawl inside his head and see what he was seeing. It's like trying to tell somebody who's blind what the color blue is like."

Pyrotechnics is a complicated area fraught with un-

foreseen problems. One of the most difficult aspects, for Paller, was matching the shots filmed in Gibsons with close-ups filmed two months later at North Shore Studios. "We have to create that same intense feeling," he said. Another explosion called for setting off seven explosions inside a house. "By the time we got to the fifth explosion, we found the wires were cut. They [Heston and Westman] wanted to see a mega-amount of debris going toward the camera but not obliterated by a fireball. So when the house fills with the fireball, we can only hope it stays together." After getting that shot off, Paller had one opportunity—and only one—to destroy the house itself. "You don't get a second chance," he said. "I always laugh because during these shots everybody becomes an expert. But nobody wants the responsibility of pushing the button. You're always thinking, 'Is somebody going to get hurt? Is somebody going to get killed?'" Still, he added, "Technically, I was very happy with the outcome."

This, considering his crew worked round the clock, putting in one 127-hour week, mostly in preparation. "I've got good people working for me," he said. "That takes a lot of weight off my shoulders."

Nettie and Wilma go from the basement to rooftop before the end of their bloody confrontation.



Still, director Heston emphasized that *NEEDFUL THINGS* was a study in character, not technical wizardry. It is not in the same league as *TERMINATOR*. "We don't have any computer opticals budget. In fact, I wish we did. What I would have liked to do was to have lightning effects. I think that can be done better in a digital mode. But that has very little to do with horror or shock value. That has more to do with visual quality. The reason I didn't ask for a large visual effects budget is that it just really didn't seem to be called for. It seemed like it is more psychological than graphic. There is a pretty graphic murder. Blood doesn't splash on the lens, but it's pretty horrible."

He was referring to a pivotal scene in which Nettie Cobb engages in a knife-fight-to-the-death with neighbor Wilma Jerzyck (Vairi Bromfield). Leland Gaunt manipulates the residents of Castle Rock like puppets, pitting them against each other in an attempt to break down the normal rules of society. The first instance of violence is a graphic one and it was up to makeup man Tibor Farkas to draw first blood. "The fight starts in a kitchen and works its way upstairs, then out a window and onto the street," he explained. "One winds up with a knife in her

Wilma (Valerie Bromfield) faces off for a fight to the death with Nettie (Amanda Plummer).



**“The studios are really touchy these days. In the early '80s you could just hack a head off. Today we get by with the sound effects and a lot of blood.”**



Under Gaunt's direction, Danforth ("Don't call me Buster") Keaton has killed a fellow resident. Sickened, he can no longer bear his own image in a mirror.

and the other with a hatchet in her head. It all went well." The fight scene "wasn't really designed to have bones sticking out. We achieved the overall effect [of serious damage] by using a lot of sound effects and a lot of blood."

**F**arkas said studios were "very touchy these days. It's not like in the old days of the early '80s when you could hack somebody's head off." Farkas knows of what he speaks. He has done makeup for *OMEN IV*, *THE AWAKENING*, *FRIDAY THE 13TH PART 8*. Fraser Heston chose to go in a different direction—to concentrate on the characters instead of the carnage. "It's not *HELLRAISER*," Farkas said. But the fight scene between Nettie and Wilma is sure to make a few theatergoers cringe. Shooting the scene took five days in all. "It was quite a complicated bit of business," Farkas said. "We literally destroy the woman's house. Then there's quite a bit of slashing and blood as they both go through the window

and end up in each other's arms with these things embedded in them." Still, he added, "It's not gore in the traditional sense."

This scene, which signals the beginning of the unraveling of Castle Rock, is the essential turning point of the story. The point in which Leland's master plan finally begins to take root. As such, director Heston paid meticulous attention to timing and choreography. "We did it with the actresses and then the stunt people. We did little mini-scenes where we'd break it down into small pieces. Sometimes I'd film just one of them. Sometimes I'd film both." Heston said he learned how to stage fight sequences from Joe Canutt, who orchestrated his father in the chariot races in *BEN-HUR*. "Joe is a master at doing fight scenes. What little I remembered, I used here." The book sees this duel take place in Castle Rock's town square, but Heston decided to move it indoors. "I didn't find the way it was written all that frightening in the script. It works in the book, but to film

that, it would be kind of open and people would just be standing around, watching. There are no traditional elements of shadows and suspense and that sort of thing. So I moved the scene inside Wilma's rickety old farmhouse and the two of them crash through this house and really tear this place up."

While *NEEDFUL THINGS* is not in the slasher mode, there are several disturbing images. One such image, of which makeup man Farkas is particularly proud, is that of Nettie's pet dog, which she finds hanging, stabbed and skinned, in her living room—the discovery that leads to her fatal confrontation with Wilma. To prepare for the reconstruction of the skinned carcass, he said, "We witnessed quite a few skinning of bears. When an animal is skinned, its color changes, which I didn't realize. So we took that into account. Then we researched dog skulls. We actually found a rottweiler skull in the taxidermy department of the University of Washington. They were nice enough to let us borrow it." While building a skinned animal out of foam rubber may not be for everyone, Farkas and his makeup crew remained clinically detached about their work. "It's like a side of beef, only bloodier."

In the King book, Leland Gaunt appears in the dreams of his customers in various incarnations—including that of baseball player Sandy Koufax (who, though asked, declined to take part in the film. To the reader, Gaunt's appearances nearly always end with his metamorphosis into a demonic creature. However, the film tends to leave more to the imagination. As such, there are no transformation scenes involving Max von Sydow. In fact, the legendary actor sports no demonic makeup at all, save for some teeth and fingernails specially constructed by Farkas. It was felt that Von Sydow, a veteran of films such as *THE EXORCIST*, was capable of conveying an expression of terror without adding latex to his distinguished features. "He does really well just with his face."

# BRAND NAME HORROR

## Stephen King's fright film factory goes into overtime.

By Gary L. Wood

THE LAWNMOWER MAN hit; SLEEPWALKERS didn't. The world of the Stephen King films has become a yearly event much like the Oscars, with fans trying to pick which King adaptations will be quality and which will not, which will score at the boxoffice and which will not. But Hollywood sees only the name behind the stories and pushes on. Luckily for fans, most of the miscellaneous companies that have produced the films in the past have been filtered out. Now only Laurel Entertainment, Castle Rock Entertainment, and Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment remain in the ring.

While Allied Vision ponders the fate of their next King project after LAWNMOWER MAN, THE MANGLER, Laurel and Castle Rock are busily readying their projects for the screen. Castle Rock's follow-up to NEEDFUL THINGS is Frank Darabont's RITA HAYWORTH AND THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION—expect a title change for the film—which will star Tim Robbins, Morgan Freeman, and Brad Pitt. Locations have been scouted in Kentucky and Ohio by Darabont. Next up for Castle Rock? DELORES CLAIRBORNE.

After completion of THE STAND, Richard Rubenstein's longtime labor of love, it is reported that THINNER is the most likely candidate for production in Laurel's hopper. With a completed script by Michael McDowell and a committed director, Tom Holland

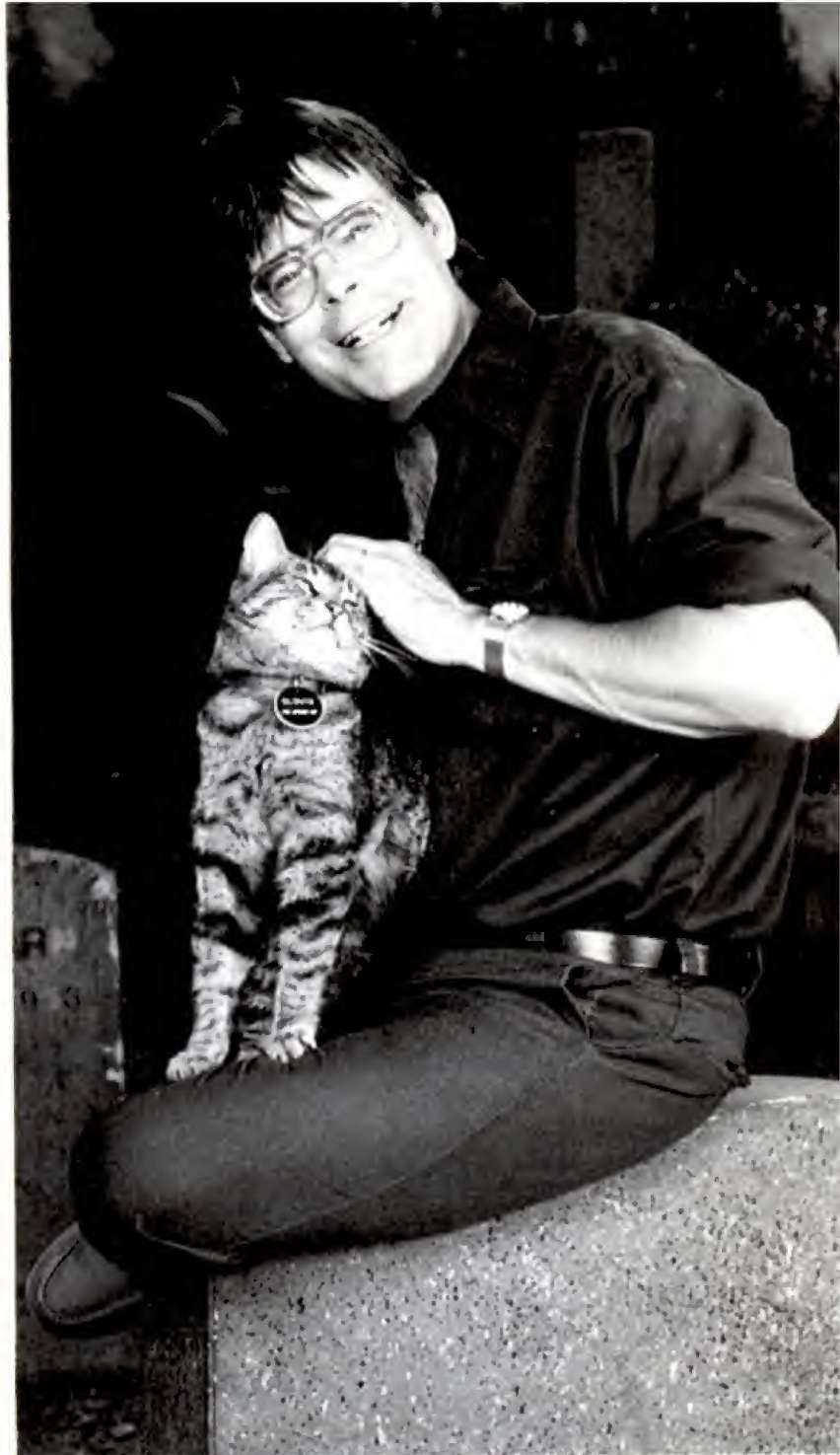
(CHILD'S PLAY), THINNER is the furthest along in development. THE NIGHT FLYER and CREEPSHOW 3, both television projects, are still on the back burners.

Everyone at Laurel these days is completely immersed in the production of THE STAND, an epic miniseries with over 125 speaking roles. Directing the mammoth production is SLEEPWALKERS director Mick Garris.

As most people know, THE STAND tells the story of a military-released virus that wipes out 90% of the world's population. The survivors rally around two opposing camps: one, around the evil Flagg while the others seek out the ancient Mother Abigail. What follows is the eternal struggle of good vs. evil for control of the Earth and its new society.

The teleplay for the mini-series was written by King who once again stated his distaste for the medium: "Screenplays never end. When you're finished with a novel, you don't have to worry about peo-

LAWNMOWER MAN's computer-generated erotica was a big hit, despite it having absolutely nothing to do with King's short story.



King, with Clovis, co-star of SLEEPWALKERS.

ple you slander. You don't have Standards and Practice telling you you can't have somebody Jewish singing "Amazing Grace." He once described screenwriting as "work for idiots" but has adapted that to "work for strong, passionate idiots." His script is 400 pages long and was rewritten five times. "That's 2,400 pages and the reason a novel didn't get written last year."

Most interesting in the King film world now is the fact that it looks as though Amblin may finally be gearing up to move forward with THE TALISMAN. Since Amblin bought the rights shortly after the book's publication, the project has been shifted back and forth between the television and feature branches at Amblin. It now seems that it is back in the feature department. A feature-length script has been completed, dated as early as May 1992, by screenwriter Richard La Gravanese (THE FISHER KING).

The script centers on the relationship between Jack and Wolf, the latter being killed within the Sunlight Gardener Home midway through the novel. The script, at this point very long, keeps Wolf alive for the quest for the Talisman and has the film climaxing within the Gardener Home. □

Farkas did construct a special set of crippled arthritic hands for actress Bonnie Bedelia (Polly) for a key scene with von Sydow. "We researched the type of arthritis she would be suffering from and we created the hands out of latex foam and then form-fitted them for her hands." The actress (HEART LIKE A WHEEL, DIE HARD) had control over the devices which, Farkas admitted, "created a bit of shock value" in her scene with von Sydow.

While Heston claimed his film remained "pretty faithful" to the original novel, Stephen King purists will notice several changes have been made and characters cut. He noted that the book consists of 736 pages, enough for about 15 hours of film. In the case of King's THE STAND, which is being made into a miniseries for television, that works fine. But in a two-hour movie, there must be a clear focus in terms of characters. The novel contains a number of flashbacks that serve to establish characters' motivations but in translating the book to film, "You have to pick and choose," he said. The few flashbacks and flashforwards that are captured in the film are done using quick cuts inside the Needful Things store. In the final chaotic scenes, Heston said he wanted to "energize" the

**Cora Rusk (Lisa Blount) makes an interesting shopping selection as the locals loot their own town.**



**“I’m nauseous over being host to a production driven by money and greed. Why does our community want to be part of it? We don’t want to be known for this trash.”**



**Near the film's conclusion, Danforth ("Don't call me Buster") Keaton offers one solution to Gaunt's pervasive effect.**

story somewhat. Hence, he added the steeple explosion. "Originally, in the book, it was the courthouse that exploded. In the script it was an oak tree that was split. I wanted to point up the irony of Gaunt, the devil, having his antique store directly across from the Catholic church. He turns to one of his customers and says, 'and you know those steeples. I hate those things.' So about three feet later it blows up. You've got to think cinematically. And I know Stephen has seen these scenes and liked them a lot. I had the strange experience of walking into the office at Castle Rock the other day and Stephen was sitting there playing my dailies. He was dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, feet up on the desk, and he was laughing hysterically. Fortunately he turned to me and said that he loved it.

"He's a really interesting guy and a very nice guy: a very sweet and easy-going man."

**T**he decision to film in the relatively isolated Gibsons was both a blessing and a curse, depending on whom you talk to.

The town is accessible only by ferry or plane and production had reached full tilt when it was thrown off track by a 48-hour ferry strike. Heston dismisses the problem, noting that most of the cast and crew were already in place. "Once we were there, we were there. A lot of us had nice houses overlooking the water. When it was over, I was actually sorry to leave. It was very isolated but when you're shooting you don't have time for anything else anyway. But the weather was another problem, with only about seven hours of daylight during October, with the omnipresent rain that is a regular feature of British Columbia this time of year."

And not everyone in the town of Gibsons was happy to have the devil in their midst. Religious leaders, most of whom hadn't even read the book nor the script, reacted strongly to the values portrayed in the film. Some were appalled that Heston would go to the trouble of blowing up a church in their midst. Violet Winegarden, granddaughter-in-law of the town's founder, George Gibson, saw the film as an example of art imitating

life. "Stephen King's latest nightmare is just another evil development. It's driven by money and greed," she was quoted as saying. "I've seen the town ruined by waves of exploiters, each more greedy than the last." Rev. Ray Austin of the Christian Life Assembly in Gibsons, said members of his congregation were "appalled" once they went out and read the book. "It plays up a conflict between the local Roman Catholic and Baptist churches," he said. "Why does our small, family-oriented community want to be a part of expressing such negative messages? I suspect the mayor and council just saw dollar signs and didn't look at the story."

Indeed, the production was a boon to local merchants who serviced the cast and crew, to local property owners (one couple was paid \$17,000 for the use of their home) and to scores of local residents who found work as day extras. Still, Rev. Calvin McIver, of the Calvary Baptist Church, was playing boss to the production "We don't want our community to be known for this trash," he told a reporter.

Heston insisted his intent is not to parody religion. "Traditionally, feuds between religious groups have been sort of caricatured. There are always a few fanatics, but it doesn't take many to start screwing things up. And that's Stephen's point. These are basically decent people and the devil comes in and uses them to do his own work by taking advantage of what are only petty jealousies. And I think the message is that we have to be on our guard against letting those things get out of hand. Look what happened in L.A. That's what the devil takes advantage of. If Gaunt hadn't come to town, little old Castle Rock would have gotten on just fine, at least until Stephen wrote another book about it."

Heston succeeded in sidestepping one ethical dilemma that was bound to be disturbing to some. A scene involving young Brian Rusk, in which the lad gives in to the devil by committing suicide is done



Local festivities (left) foreshadow Gaunt's plans (center) for the town's Lady of the Serene Waters church. Designer Doug Higgins built a hinge on the steeple of the on-location set, due to concerns that it was so well-built that it wouldn't fall in the explosion. Lower right: Director Fraser Heston on location.

"very circumspectfully, but very well. You don't see him put the gun to his head and blow his brains out. In fact, he survives." This minor plot change has two effects: first, it denies the devil a victory and second, it reduces the level of blood on the screen. "There are many different ways of conveying horror and sometimes the most subliminal ways are the most effective."

Getting the subliminal effect was part of the reason Heston leaped at the opportunity of casting von Sydow in the role of the demonic Gaunt. "My theory is that the devil isn't a horrible person with horns growing out of his head. He's prob-

ably a very nice guy. He sits down next to you and beguiles you and gets you to do things he wants you to do." As played by von Sydow, the director said, "Gaunt is a very cultured, pleasant, intelligent European gentleman. He wears impeccable suits, he speaks in a slow, measured cadence, with alacrity. He's got a great wit, he's very funny. He has a tremendous sense of timing. He's rather like von Sydow, actually."

Ed Harris (THE ABYSS, THE RIGHT STUFF), who plays the sheriff, also has a high regard for von Sydow, with whom he worked once before, in France, in 1985. "I

haven't seen him for all these years. But he's still a real professional and fine gentleman."

Harris, who has a cameo role in an installment of THE STAND, sees similarities between his character and that of Bud Brigman, whom he portrayed in THE ABYSS. "A fairly straight guy who's got to come out of his shell to save the day." Although a good deal of Pangborn's painful history was cut during the transition to film, Harris says his character's emotional shortcomings are evident on screen. "He's been sheriff a few years and the biggest thing he's had to do was to get a damn cat out of a tree. He's got a big heart, but other than that, we don't really know too much about his past." Pangborn manages to distance himself from the chaos until his relationship with Polly Chalmers is threatened by her visit to Gaunt. That is when the officer's mettle is finally put to the test.

Harris, who has worked with George Romero but professes little love for so-called slasher films, admitted it was a tough shoot. "I was in Gibsons for four of five weeks and the sun went down around four. I never saw the daytime and when it wasn't raining we



were makin' rain." Still, he added, "I think Fraser did an excellent job casting the film. The danger was that the people out of town would be played as caricatures," he said. "But that didn't happen. I think things'll ring pretty true." He sees NEEDFUL THINGS as a basic dramatization of good versus evil. "I'm really curious about how this film will look."

So is Castle Rock. They expect this treatment of King's bestseller to go over well with long-time fans. And while director Heston admitted that, logistically, NEEDFUL THINGS is "the toughest film I've ever shot," he promised, "If you're a true Stephen King fan, you won't be disappointed." □

Director Heston and his crew film an ominous Gaunt (Max von Sydow) overlooking the town of Castle Rock from Lighthouse Park.



# Stephen King's **THE TOMMYKNOCKERS**

**Alterian Studios goes down under to create King's Boogeymen from Outer Space.**

*By Gary Wood*

"TOMMYKNOCKERS is a very different adaptation than a lot of Steve's pieces, meaning that the first 200 pages or so of the book are very contained and really only feature two characters. Then you sort of leave for an extended, several hundred page run and meet all the other people who live in this town. So adapting it was basically taking the dozens of pieces of this jigsaw puzzle, throwing them up in the air, and having them come down in a very integrated structure," said Larry Cohen of his adaptation process for ABC's Novel for Television STEVEN KING'S TOMMY-KNOCKERS.

The production seemed like a dream project from the beginning, but slowly turned sour: ABC was thrilled with Cohen's initial drafts of the two-night series. Jimmy Smits (LA LAW, THE BELIEVERS) was cast as the lead. Tony Gardner's Alterian Studios, the men behind ARMY OF DARKNESS, THE ADDAMS FAMILY and SLEEPWALKERS, would be handling the visual effects, and veteran King film director Lewis Teague (CUJO, CAT'S EYE) was hired as director. In an unusual turn, the production was transplanted to New Zealand for production.

Once in New Zealand, however, the weather made for a miserable production and Teague was replaced. Producer Frank Konigsberg said, "Teague shot a week's worth and was replaced, due to a different concept of the project."



Karyn Malchus models the latest in Tony Gardner alien fashion wear. The climactic confrontation with 6'-plus Jimmy Smits had to be filmed using ramps to offset Malchus' 5'4" frame.

A writer in Hollywood quickly learns to adjust to the difference between a screenplay and its interpretation. Cohen learned this even more with ABC's IT. "My desire is that TOMMYKNOCKERS comes out and pleases me and pleases Steve. I had my own ambivalence about how IT emerged when all was said and done. I was delighted by its success and particularly de-

lighted by the fact that Steve, with the exception of the last 15 minutes or so, was pleased with it. My standards are inordinately high and what I'm hoping for, in both of these projects, is that they'll please my standards as well as Steve's and the readers."

As in IT, the key to the entire films' believability will be in the believability of the aliens when they emerge in the cli-

max. Visualizing the aliens, which terrorize the small town of Haven, Maine, was to be the task of Alterian Studios' Tony Gardner. Fortunately for Gardner and his crew, they were in an interesting position coming off of SLEEPWALKERS. Gardner said, "The body structure of the Tommyknockers is the original concept of the Sleepwalkers. With SLEEPWALKERS, we wanted the arms and legs to imply that the creature had a body structure different than a human."

Alterian even went so far as to design hand, arm and leg extensions for their creature actor, Karyn Malchus, but they were never produced. "The production didn't understand the concept and axed it."

Gardner didn't want to repeat the climax of IT, where the realistic characters and situations that were developed over two nights were suddenly destroyed by the sight of grown men tearing apart a giant toy spider. Here, the challenge was to have actor Smits locked in mortal combat without revealing that his opponent was actually a small woman in a big, silly, harmless suit.

This was accomplished by using Gardner's system in which Karyn was placed in a wire rig and arm, leg and hand extensions for three or four specific establishing shots. Gardner explained, "So you could see the full body and see the body configurations. The alien was designed to be the same height as Smits, but Karyn is only 5'4". With those shots, we sold what the character was, its size and speed.





Smits puts himself in the driver's seat, assuming control of the alien's vessel in a self-sacrificing act to save the people of Maven. Inset: Alterian Studios' Tony Gardner (standing) and Brian Panikas doing between-scenes alien touch-ups.

For the remainder of the shots, and the fight, we had portable ramps designed. We literally moved those around the set so she could move more realistically and maintain the illusion of height. It would also allow Smits to fight the alien in a realistic manner, not worrying about rigging or extensions to limit their physical actions.

"We storyboarded the whole ending," continued Gardner. "All of this gave Karyn the freedom to *act* in the suit, and improvise her move-

ments. The system and the establishing shots were crucial to the believability of the ending."

Cohen agreed, "The spider in *IT* looked like an escapee from a Japanese horror film. The climax in *TOMMYKNOCKERS* is a much more *achievable* one." The battle comes down to one alien, who, in a life force-draining fashion, tricks the characters into coming into the ship and morphs into their identity—a switch from the novel where the

aliens remain "ghosts" and never come to life.

It is Bobby's entrance into the ship that allows one alien to "morph" and do battle with Smits. Cohen said, "It's scaled down quite a bit. It was on a much grander scale when Lewis Teague was attached. We had *hordes* of aliens. Now we've got a few. It was much more manageable."

Teague's replacement was Australian director John Power, whose most notable credit is *FATHER*, which Konigsberg described as an Australian *MUSIC BOX*, where a woman's father is accused of being a Nazi and tried for war crimes.

With the struggle of *TOMMYKNOCKERS* behind them, Cohen and the team of Konigsberg/Sanitsky are continuing development on their adaptation of *THE STAND-IN*, starring Anjelica Huston. Cohen has also completed an original script titled *NIGHTMARE ON ALCATRAZ*. "It's definitely in the *ELM STREET/FRIDAY THE 13TH* tradition," said Cohen.



Alterian Studios is currently working on *THE ADDAMS FAMILY* sequel, as well as making history with *THE DAY THE WORLD CHANGED*, the first IMAX theatre feature, a 30-minute film that is shown on the IMAX 50-foot surround screen. Gardner said working for this format was a challenge. "On the large screen, not only can you see every pore on the head, but every *hair* in every pore."

As for another King adaptation, Konigsberg said, "Nothing planned at the moment because he's got nothing left. He's *sold out*. But then King has never been anything but *prolific*." □

The aliens (who've mastered interstellar flight, but apparently not clothing) revive *en masse* to meet Smits' challenge to their master plan.



# T H


## The

*By Charles  
Leayman*

The Pennsylvania lands surrounding Pittsburgh are to a great extent rural: gently hilled and valleyed, dotted with American Gothic wood dwellings that struggle gamely against the ramshackle effects of time. By and large the landscape suggests "country," with all the word's peculiarly American connotations of scarce money, modest dreams and hard work.

It's a setting made indelible by George A. Romero's original NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, wherein the denizens of these out-of-the-way spaces emerge from their diners, truck stops and flea markets as flesh-hungry ghouls (Tom Savini's remake added somberly accurate color to the tale: those muted natural shades that give the countryside a faint tinge of anemia.) By contrast, downtown Pittsburgh is heavily corporate, a new-money outcropping of steel and chrome with lingering architectural reminders of a more traditional past.

Pittsburgh has been Romero's artistic home-base from the very beginning of his career and it served as the principal shooting locale for his adaptation of Stephen King's 484-page bestseller, THE DARK HALF. The book enacts a classic doppelganger plot in which Thad Beaumont, a respected writer who moonlights as the author of lurid shockers under the name of George Stark, discovers that his literary alter ego has come to life



When preview audiences were confused by the birds seemingly carrying Stark off to Heaven, Romero shot additional scenes with a third-stage puppet that made it clear that Stark got what he deserved. The psychomorphs tear his body apart and a vortex sucks it out of our dimension.



# Stephen King's

# THE DARK HALF

**Alter-ego terror finally takes flight.**

and is bent on destroying his creator and all those close to him. The film (Romero's most expensive to date) was financed by Orion Pictures, who originally planned a Fall 1991 release. Unfortunately, the company was forced to file a "chapter 11" for bankruptcy, and the film languished on the shelf for nearly two years, before its theatrical release in April of this year in the wake of Orion's recovery attempt.

Principal shooting on *THE DARK HALF* began in October 1990 and a visit in late November provided a brief but illuminating look at the workings of a Romero set. On this particular occasion, filming was taking place within the immense hangar-like interior of the Hunt National Guard Armory.

Glimpsed among the omnipresent cables and metal-encased lights, George Romero stood with a pronounced frown on his otherwise amiable face. A large man wearing his signature safari jacket, whose size confirms the genial expansiveness of his personality, Romero broke stride to proffer a genuinely friendly if distracted welcome, then returned his full attention to the shooting. The scene at hand depicted Stark's brutal murder of *People* magazine writer Mike Donaldson (played by Kent Broadhurst) in the hallway of his apartment building. The footage had been "in the can," but laboratory work revealed the film stock to be flawed, requiring immediate re-shooting, which meant that Romero was temporarily behind schedule.

Still, Romero's mood and the atmosphere of the set remained purposive but calm. The director even took time to grant an interview, one which he indulged with a customary enthusiasm. Indeed, "enthusiastic" is an adjective frequently used by Romero's colleagues in describing him, topped perhaps only by "honest." It's a word meant to convey not only Romero's personal sense of ethics and his dedication to craft and crew, but an attitude toward his audience that prevents him from "cheating" in terms of his effects, whether literary or technical.

One of those quick to testify on Romero's behalf is Pat Buba, editor for six of Romero's films including *THE DARK HALF*. Born and raised in Pittsburgh, Buba embarked on filmmaking in the early 1970s when, fresh out of college, he helped form a production company to make industrial shorts and commercials. With left-over rolls of film, Buba and his friends shot 10-to-15-minute dramatic films. The group's work inevitably came to the attention of Romero, who hired Buba's company to help in shooting a series of such documentaries.

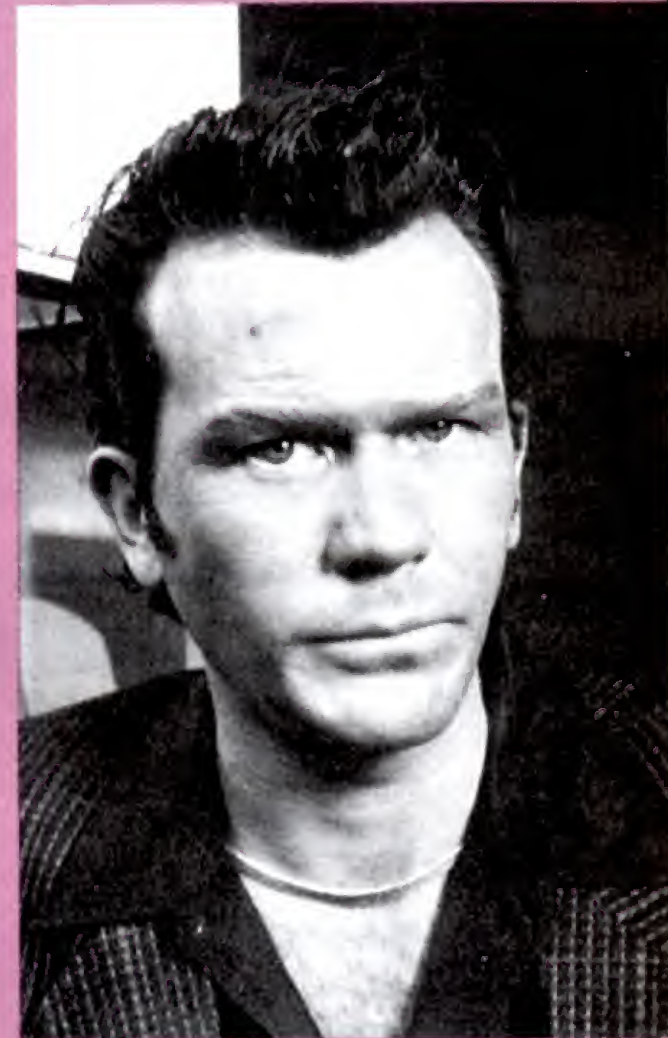
Pat Buba freely admits that he had no formal training as an editor, and learned by doing. Working at WQED was of course a major learning experience, but the chief influence on Buba's career was the musical training he imbibed from third grade through five years of college, a background on which he draws in terms of visual rhythm and structure. "Each scene is a phrase, and

the overall film a kind of movement. Just as you can instinctively hear the form and structure of a piece of music, you can see it when you watch a movie."

Romero shot *MARTIN* at Buba's house ("Martin's bed was my bed," reported Buba. "That's where I grew up"), with his brother doing audio, his father props, and his mother serving as caterer. (Buba himself played a coke dealer who gets blown away, as well as a zombie in *DAWN OF THE DEAD*.) Buba's wife Zilla was production manager on Romero's *KNIGHTRIDERS*, and helped her husband get his first feature-length assignment, co-editing *KNIGHTRIDERS'* 300,000 feet of film with Romero while also serving as assistant director (a combination that Buba "doesn't recommend").

*KNIGHTRIDERS* was a seminal experience. Not only did Buba learn invaluable lessons from working with Romero ("a phenomenal editor who's really good at structure") but immensely benefited from studying actor Ed Harris' "thinking process, his reactions to what's going on around him." Watching Harris taught Buba that conventional cutting for reactions and flow can ill-serve a performer whose intelligence and intensity dictate the rhythms of his performance (as with Timothy Hutton).

For Buba as for Romero, "telling a story and entertaining the people who are watching that story is the same process. And besides, it's fun to scare people." When catch-



Hutton as George Stark, a brilliantly subtle and natural makeup by Optic Nerve Effects.

ing previews of films on which they've worked, editor and director listen for what Buba calls "jubes": those moments when a viewer's induced fright causes him or her to spill their jubes on the theatre floor; the more plentiful the candies spilled, the better the fright. Establishing a film's overall rhythm is particularly difficult on projects involving special effects, having to wait for optical or effects footage that may not be available till months later.

Matters weren't helped by the tenuous state of Orion, *THE DARK HALF*'s distributor. As editing proceeded, the Los Angeles newspapers almost daily reported the direness of

Orion's financial straits. The project was in the dubbing stage when the company finally declared bankruptcy. Nonetheless, the film was completed, even though there was no time for the previews that are normally held even during the mixing and editing of the final print. Not having the chance to test his edited footage against an audience reaction, Buba's work on *THE DARK HALF* was a lot more "instinctive" and "second guessing" than usual.

The single preview which *THE DARK HALF* did have, before an Orange County audience, necessitated a new ending. Buba mentioned "religious indoctrination" as a possible reason for the audience's response to Stark's removal through a window. "Everyone said, 'He's ascended! He didn't deserve to ascend!'" Buba feels that the fact that Stark's angle of exit was higher than 45 degrees somehow cued the audience's response.

Even without the audience previews, Buba's final impression of *THE DARK HALF* was wholly favorable. "Along with *MISERY*, *THE DARK HALF* is the most faithful to date of Steve's writing. Any fan of the book will like this movie."

**S**pecial makeup effects supervisors John Vulich and Everett Burrell had to transform Hutton's daytime persona as Thad Beaumont into its sinister opposite, George Stark. "We spent so much time in Tim's face," Burrell recalled. "Hutton's very much a Method actor," Vulich added, "and makeup for him is a very personal thing. He was intensely concerned at all times. If a sideburn wasn't just so, he would call our attention to it, so he kept us on our toes. Everett and I had in mind an early-to-mid '70s Tom Selleck/Marlboro Man look, a macho character that someone Thad's age might fantasize." Hutton insisted that Stark not be too much of a caricature, that he and Thad should always be recognizable as the same person. Special body padding gave the actor's already well-formed physique added bulk.

**“The most fun we have with Romero is when we give him new toys. Mechanical puppets or effects with no actors involved. Just us, George and lots of blood.”**



Filming Pittsburgh for King's Maine, Timothy Hutton (l), producer Declan Baldwin, Orion executive John Machione and director George A. Romero (r).

Hutton sat with Vulich and Burrell at the Amiga computer on which the two artists devised their makeup designs, offering precise opinions about his character's hairline, cheekbones, facial hair and such. Stark's appearance goes through seven different stages that become progressively more extreme as the character deteriorates. He gradually sprouts boils and blisters that Vulich called "hideous but natural," while a series of contact lenses give the figure's eyes an ever redder and wilder glare. Naturalism and subtlety were keynotes of the makeup approach, with Stark's slightly skeletal appearance and increasingly ravaged con-

dition based on actual disease prototypes.

For Burrell, Stark's deterioration (his "losing cohesion," as King puts it) was his favorite part of the makeup process, a chance to put onscreen something of the EC Comics spirit that he, Vulich, and Romero all loved as kids. "Making someone get worse with an open blister or oozing sore is relatively easy in makeup terms. It's also a lot of fun. What's difficult is to do it in reverse, to achieve 'healing effects' without cheesy camera stuff."

Burrell (who lent Hutton videotapes of James Whale's *THE INVISIBLE MAN* so he could study Claude Rains' escalating insanity) cited the line

in Romero's script that simply states, "Thad starts to lose cohesion as George gets better." In conceptualizing the idea, he adapted Steve Johnson's airbrush effects in *DEAD HEAT* to Stark's regeneration. "I used an off-camera airbrush to squirt color onto Hutton's face, and inflated bladders with air to give a tumorous effect. The squirting paint was invisible to the eye and when the effect was reversed, the blisters appeared to get smaller and the colors disappeared." The results in daily rushes were "great." As Vulich noted, "Thad undergoes no equal transference in the opposite direction: at most a cheekbone splits and his forehead cracks open via tubing and prosthetics."

"Performers respect George Romero because he's a very good director of actors," continued Burrell. Pointing toward Romero onset as he coached actress Rutanya Alda (who, as Miriam Cowley, meets a most unpleasant fate at Stark's hands), Burrell described him as "real caring and a tender man to watch," and offered a quick injunction, which practically everyone interviewed might have echoed: "If you have the opportunity to work with George, do it!"

Besides makeup chores, John Vulich and Everett Burrell also coordinated mechanical effects for *THE DARK HALF*. The two brought to the project a sophisticated knowledge of effects and makeup technology that they've fine-tuned by working in California. According to Burrell, "Hollywood has the best technicians in the world within a 50-mile radius. Where Tom Savini, for all his groundbreaking work on Romero's films, was limited in what he could achieve by his decision to live and work in Pittsburgh, the Optic Nerve team gave Romero "new toys to play with" like the Amiga computer" that set the director's imagination percolating. Romero has lost little of the enthusiasm that first fueled *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD*. "The most fun John and I have with George," confided Burrell, "is when we do mechanical puppets or effects, with no actors involved: just us, George,

and the camera guys. And lots of blood."

Several of King's more indelible images stretched the two self-styled "Method make-up artists" to the limit. For example, for the sequence of young Thad's brain surgery, where a fetally absorbed eye is found embedded in the boy's cerebral lobes, the pair found a rich source of information from a practicing pediatric brain surgeon whose house was coincidentally rented by the film company.

According to the doctor, King's novel mixes two kinds of physical aberration: a "teratoma tumor," caused by germ cells that inexplicably go awry and begin reproducing random parts of the body, and a "parasitic twin" in which a duplicate organ forms and is absorbed by the body in the manner of Siamese twins and so-called "circus freaks" (Vulich cited *THE MANITOU* as an earlier genre spin on the notion). Of the thousands of brain operations performed by the team's medical advisor, only about a dozen yielded teratoma tumors and these contained at most hairballs or pieces of tissue, never whole organs.

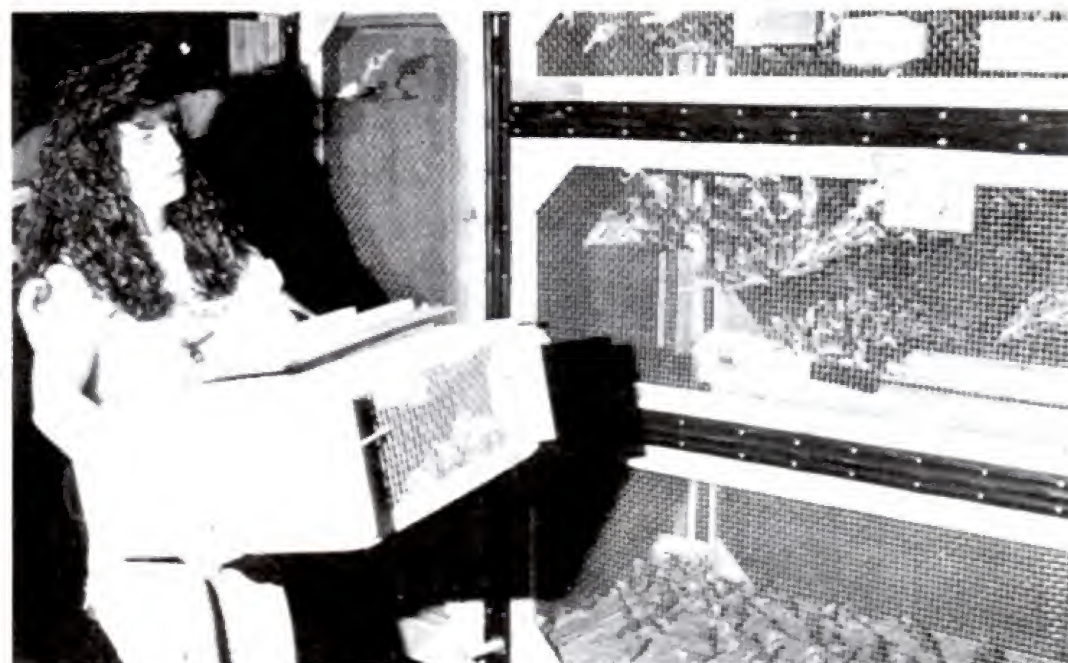
The discovery of the absorbed eyeball is "a very weird effect," said Burrell. "Taking a medical point of view, we produced a very layered model: skull, tissue, skin. The only thing I regret is that we didn't make the brain pulsate because the doctor claimed that it doesn't happen. But I've seen brain footage since, and it does." (King's book in fact



Bird wrangler Mark Harden (above) with a few of his winged actors. Wire and plywood tunnels and cages (below) were used by Harden to train and exercise the finches as stand-ins for King's psychomorphs.

emphasizes the brain's pulsations, which lend the buried orb an obscenely fitful life.)

Romero (whose onscreen hands wield the probing tool that uncovers the eye) decided that, on first being glimpsed after Thad's skull is removed, the embedded invader should look simply like a tumor marring the brain's surface. Then, as the tool moves closer, the "tumor" abruptly opens its eye and winks. "We gave it a cataracted look, fearing that a baby-blue eye, say, would have the audience laughing. Otherwise, we could have simply put brain makeup on somebody and had them look around." Laughing at the idea, Burrell admitted that the notion of an entire teratoma eyeball is "silly," but felt pleased with the grisly plausibility he and



Vulich brought to it.

Vulich waxed enthusiastic about the Amiga computer as an endless source of fertile ideas. He and Burrell used it extensively for the first time in designing effects for Tom Savini's *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD* remake and hope to expand its capabilities far beyond *THE DARK HALF*. "We're the first guys to be using it on this scale, and we're really excited about its possibilities for the future. Computer use is becoming more standard. I know Rick Baker works with a Macintosh. But Everett and I are the only guys using an Amiga for makeup work and the first guys to say we do it."

Shooting on *THE DARK HALF* wrapped in Pittsburgh in February of 1991, and the unit moved to Los Angeles where

Romero edited the film. As mentioned, there was some preview audience confusion over Stark's demise and his final destination. According to Burrell, "George wanted to spice up the final reel with additional effects for Stark. In the new ending, the birds still engulf Stark, but now also remove all the flesh from his body and smash his bones and he crumbles. A vortex opens up another plane of existence into which both bones and birds disappear." The accomplishment of *THE DARK HALF*'s spectacular ending came from the combined work of Mark Harden, the film's self-styled "bird wrangler," and Visual Concept Engineering (VCE) head Peter Kuran and his effects director Kevin Kutchaver.

Amy Madigan and Timothy Hutton as Liz and Thad Beaumont at the mock funeral of Thad's literary alter ego, George Stark.



Harden's career began by orchestrating 300 tarantulas for a scene in Jack Clayton's *SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES*. Since then, he has supervised animal acquisition, training and handling for *NEVER CRY WOLF*, *LADY-HAWKE*, *CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR* and *PROJECT X*. For *THE DARK HALF* Harden was responsible for the care and training of the 5,000 cutthroat finches (named for the scarlet band around the males' necks) who stand in for King's "psychomorphs" in the film's conclusion.

According to Harden, "The birds are used to seeing and being around people, unlike sparrows" (for which they are standing in). The birds were culled from three quarantine centers in California (after having undergone the regulation 45-day detention on arrival in America), then were flown east, perhaps the most difficult part of the production's initial phase due to the sheer logistics involved in moving so many specimens.

Earlier, producer Declan Baldwin emphasized the need for a bird-training center in Pittsburgh itself: an on-site residence close to the actual shooting locales, in which the birds' behavior could be developed and adapted in close proximity to the filmmakers' needs.

The result was a massive installation in downtown Pittsburgh, primarily designed by Harden and Animal Actors founder Hubert Wells. Through an interconnecting series of wire-and-plywood cages and meshed corridors, the birds were exercised daily by flying from one enclosed area to another, their progress channeled by a system of hinged doors that permitted entrance and exit in whatever direction was required. "It keeps them in shape, alert and healthy," observed Harden. "You can actually see them getting stronger by the day. If we didn't exercise them, they wouldn't respond on filming days. So, in effect, we're rehearsing them."

Unlike most of Harden's staff, the birds had weekends off. They were housed in three

**"If we thought we needed three layers of birds, then we needed nine. It's just like a STAR WARS shot. It ends up becoming a monstrous jigsaw puzzle."**



The rapidly decomposing Stark visits Thad's home for some decidedly non-quality time with the Beaumont children.

foot by eight foot by eight foot temperature-controlled cages; electric heat above each fell in gentle tent-like patterns at 80 degrees. The birds were restricted to a high-vitamin diet of Vita-Finch feed containing nine different grains, plus spinach, carrots, broccoli and zucchini. Wooden food traps called "Bird Funneling Devices" (eighteen inches by two feet by nine inches deep) put the finches through a set of learned responses that culminated in a food reward.

At the bird training compound, Harden demonstrated a method for teaching finches to "shatter" walls. Strings were attached to a frieze of wooden lathes representing the Beaumont study's devastated wall, ostensibly fractured and pecked apart by millions of hungry beaks.

The birds were channeled toward the lathes and the strings were pulled just as they made contact, allowing the little creatures to pass through unharmed while giving the illusion of their having crashed

the wall's barrier. Making these illusions work to their optimum, as well as creating many other unreal "reel" moments was the responsibility of Kuran and Kutchaver at VCE, both of whom were largely responsible for the film's optically demanding finale involving hundreds of birds photographed against a blue screen background.

**K**utchaver worked on *THE DARK HALF* in Pittsburgh from November 1 to February 1991, planning complex split-screen shots, working with bird trainer Mark Harden, and "previsualizing" what would happen in the various shots so he could "shepherd" them through VCE's optical laboratories. While there he supervised the shooting of 10,000 feet of blue screen bird footage, and recalled working with bird trainer Mark Harden as "great, a lot of fun!" Harden employed 5,000 finches, but could work only 1,000 at a time. He trained them to fly

from perch to perch in sessions of from 10 to 15 minutes, after which the very small, fragile creatures would tire. "The birds had a set of criteria you simply had to deal with," Kutchaver explained. "And all they basically ever wanted to do was just sit down. But Mark always had a group on hand that was rested and rotated."

Kutchaver catalogued all the bird footage and "choreographed" where the footage would go in a particular shot or sequence of shots. He kept in mind Romero's particular concern about the direction of the birds' flight, anxious as he was that the shot-to-shot flow of their trajectories not be erratic or discontinuous. What Harden and Kutchaver could not obtain from their winged charges, however, was the impression of flying away in a massed group, the birds customarily simply scattered.

In Los Angeles, Kutchaver's imagination was stretched wide "trying to figure out what else I could shoot that would look like a bird." He photographed styrofoam pellets falling out of a shaker against black, to represent birds at a distance. He made what looked like a big Christmas tree with 5000 floral birds attached that could be spun around to help visualize what Romero saw as a "tornado of birds." He coordinated the shooting of bird silhouettes against a white background. Using a rear projector, these images were then thrown onto the actors' faces to give an effect of falling shadows (in addition to the layered blue screen birds flying around "in front of" the actors). Kutchaver said he "ran the gamut of things to fill the sequence out. We certainly didn't want to recycle footage. The result ranges from fairly subtle opticals to completely gonzo bird mania."

As an example of VCE's work, Kuran cited a shot near the end of the film in which Sheriff Pangborn bursts through the door of Thad's summer cottage. What in reality involved no more than five actual birds, fluttering erratically around actor Michael Rooker, became on film a



(Left) Second stage Stark puppet with crew: (l-r) Gerald Gergely, Greg Funk, Toni Savini, Ken Walker and Optic Nerve boss-man, John Vulich. (Right) Stark under attack by King's psychomorphs. Lower right: Young Thad's seeing-eye brain, inspired by actual parasitic twin organs found in surgeries.

flood of winged avengers, effected by numerous optical layers. "Kevin figured out, looking at the birds' flight on five different passes, which would be in front and which behind in any given frame. He had to track each bird individually to make the effect and the shot work."

"Everything was exponen-

A handful of finches fly between a window set and a blue screen, allowing VCE to add elements later.

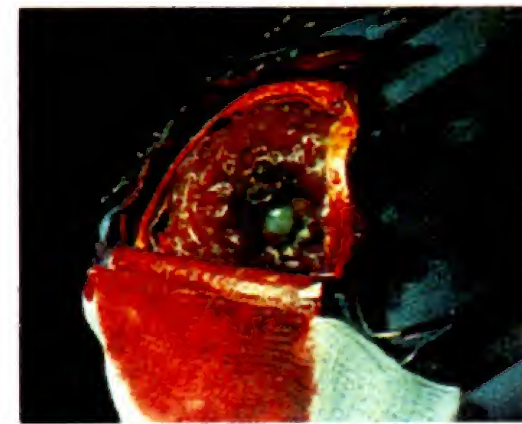


tial on THE DARK HALF," Kutchaver added. "If we thought we needed three layers of blue screen birds, we ended up needing nine." The main problem for Kuran and the VCE people was that the birds didn't "read" well, never appearing numerous enough in the onscreen live footage. This necessitated VCE's layering in from 13 to 15 layers of blue screen birds on a given shot, which, according to Kutchaver, was "almost unheard of."

"It's not like a STAR WARS shot where you have all of these layers of spaceships and none ever cross each other," Kutchaver explained. In THE DARK HALF, "The birds are working the whole screen, constantly crossing each other. And anything that has a cross-over means that for every layer of blue screen, you have to

have a matte that holds all the birds out except the one in front, shot to shot. Fifteen layers of blue screen means 15 mattes. The whole thing ends up being a monstrous jigsaw puzzle."

Kutchaver, (whose first job with Peter Kuran was on RETURN OF THE JEDI, "doing light-sabre stuff") is, like Kuran, an ardent perfectionist. He professed meeting a lot of good people on THE DARK HALF, including John Vulich and Everett Burrell, whose friendship he made while working in Pittsburgh ("Now we bother each other almost daily.") In fact, Kutchaver stayed on in Pittsburgh for eight or nine weeks after shooting ended, "pretty much on my own nickel," eager to continue fine-tuning a project to which he and Kuran have contributed much time and energy. An-



other reason was George Romero. "I wanna make sure George is happy," he said with both professional admiration and genuine affection. "He's that kind of guy. George is demanding, but he's changed this business and deserves to be."

Of course, nothing can upstage Kevin Kutchaver's most recent project, his baby daughter. And he admitted being astonished by the fact that "I was able to replicate myself in less time than it's taken THE DARK HALF to come out." □

# THE ALIENATION OF DAVID FINCHER

**Director gets what he wants  
and it's simply too much.**

*By Mark Burman*

From potential *wunderkind* to wipeout in the space of one movie seems to be the general verdict on David Fincher's directorial debut. The fans loathed it, the critics dripped acid on it and Fox somehow conspired to create a marketing campaign so dreary that you felt they must have had Fincher in their sights.

There's no doubting the fact that ALIEN 3's dark, doom-laden and garbled tale is

anathema to fans of Cameron's kick-ass kineticism. Only in Europe and Japan, where the boxoffice has been healthy and the critics much kinder, has ALIEN 3 found a home of sorts. Perhaps its relentless pessimism appeals, maybe the dialogue plays better in French. Who knows, how many ways are there to dub 'fuck' anyway?

At least Ripley gets to plunge into the cleansing flames for her efforts. All David Fincher gets is a loud raspber-

ry from Tinseltown's assembled multitude of nay sayers and told-you-sos. The relentless drubbing given him and his film has kept him mum until now.

What was to be a brief telephone conversation for the BBC on the more esoteric aspects of the alien turned into a long confessional, shot full of irony. Actually admitting to liking ALIEN 3 brings forth the first of many long sighs from Fincher.

"Well I'm glad somebody likes it, it's good to hear. I think audiences find it pretentious and ponderous and resent the fact that it's not a scary-scary movie. It's a queasy-scary movie.

"The first thing that we decided was that the alien wasn't going to be the main focus. It's like the bridge on the River Kwai, the bridge is one of the things you have to deal with, that's not what the movie is about. The idea was not to make a whiz bang, shoot 'em up. But to deal with this character. Let's put a 40-year-old woman in outer space, not an underwear-clad victim like in the first ALIEN."

Fincher's involvement with ALIEN 3 verges on the Faustian, that, or one of those little

moral tales along the line of, "be careful what you wish for." Rewind to 1977 and you'll find boy David grooving to the Dolby of STAR WARS. Two years later comes a little number, courtesy of Ridley Scott, that rattles his 16-year-old brain and first sends him hurtling towards Hollywood.

"Oh God, ALIEN changed my life! It just seemed so real to me. I was aware of being told things about people and story through the art direction rather than exposition. I always thought Ridley was brilliant but I never appreciated just how brilliant he was, until I tried to make this movie.

"Actually he came down to the set once when we were setting fire to something. In he walked with his silk suit and one of his big Cuban cigars, looking fabulous. There was a documentary crew from the publicity machine at Fox filming the whole conversation.

"Ridley asked how it was going and I said 'Really bad' and he said, 'It never goes well, this is not the way to make movies, make sure you make a little film where you have some control while they're beating you up.' And all he did was tell me how he still hasn't seen a dime from the



ALIEN 3's redesigned costume.

Despite the overwhelmingly negative reaction to the film, Fincher and Weaver have remained openly positive about each other's input in the final product.







Without Giger's input, the man-in-a-suit origins are all too obvious.

first ALIEN. I don't think they ever used it in the documentary!"

The son of a *Life* magazine reporter, Fincher was already producing a local television news show while in high school. By 19 he was working in the dream factory of George Lucas' Industrial Light & Magic as a matte artist. Two years later he was directing his first video eventually going on to

become a founding member of Propaganda, a highly successful promo company.

And that's where Hollywood found him, shooting videos for the likes of Madonna and Paula Abdul. It was, as they say, an offer he couldn't refuse. A chance to play with the train set he had always dreamed of, his very own ALIEN film. It should have been megabuck heaven but in-

**DIRECTOR DAVID FINCHER**

**“The ultimate goal for ALIEN 3 was to do something so offensive that, just by knowing who the return audience was, we could box up all the Jeffrey Dahmers.”**

stead metamorphosed into production hell.

Like its starring creature the film had already consumed victims a plenty, and here was Fincher all ready to carve himself a little slice of personal Hades at Pine-wood studios. You can almost see the smoke rising off the contract.

“Oh, it was just awful. This is the worse thing that ever happened to me. Look, it would be stupid for me to say that I didn't know what I was getting into. It took me five years to decide what I wanted to do and I always held out for something of this scale because I like this kind of canvas, I like the scope of this kind of thing.”

(He gives a long sigh.) “The lesson to be learned is that you really can't take on an enterprise of this size and scope if you don't really have a movie like TERMINATOR or JAWS behind you. When Steven Spielberg comes in and says, ‘I made JAWS, the biggest grossing movie of all time and I

want \$18 million to do CLOSE ENCOUNTERS,’ which is probably the equivalent to what we spent, it's very nice to be able to say ‘This is the guy who directed the biggest grossing movie of all time. Sit down and shut up, and feel lucky that you've got him.

“It's another thing when everybody's wringing their handkerchiefs and sweating and puking blood because of the money that's being spent and you're going ‘Trust me, this is what I really believe in’ and they turn around and say ‘Well, who the fuck are you, who cares what you believe in?’”

Fincher may not have had an offscreen romance with the Fox moneymen but both star Sigourney Weaver and producer/co-writer David Giler were impressed with Fincher's ideas for ALIEN 3. Shaving Ripley's head was his opening gambit at his initial meeting with them. Much less impressed have been the fans who found Ripley's final exit a

Fury 161's prisoners are so interchangeable that it's hard to know who is getting eaten, and even harder to care. Studio cuts didn't help the characterizations.





Amalgamated Dynamics' man-in-suit, offing warden Brian Glover (left) and moving in for the kill on Dillon (Charles S. Dutton) as Sigourney Weaver watches.

distinct downer. But Fincher remains convinced that dramatic logic dictated the need for Ripley to bid farewell.

"In a way we had to rationalize it. Here is this woman waking up again and finding the same fucking monster. Please! We decided the reason it keeps happening is because that's what she is cursed to do. She is cursed to fight this thing until it's over.

"I had a master plan for the whole thing. I saw the first film as the beginning of the yuppie ideal. It was getting ahead in the office, sticking to the proto-

col and being vocal and eventually triumphing through one's own beliefs." Obviously it's more than that, it's a monster movie and it's Ten Little Indians, but I saw that film as being a real kind of personal empowerment. They gave it a feminist message as well.

"In 1978 you have the beginning of the whole 'Me' decade and then by the time of the second film in 1986, you had a lot of women coming to grips with wanting a career and also having these incredible maternal instincts and I think ALIENS really taps into

that.

"And when we started this one I thought what could I do with the story that would ride the next yuppie wave? And I thought what are yuppies coming to grips with? Sacrifice, the idea that sacrifice was a noble, capitalist alternative. We've come full circle and realized that selflessness is as important as selfishness in order to survive. So I thought that's the obvious place to go with this character because we're not really going to have too much more to do with her.

"Once we decided we were

going to kill Ripley off we had a lot of fights and discussions about building to that moment and I always said you can't work backwards from the idea of Ripley sacrificing her life. Certainly in terms of the American audience you can't because that's still seen in American culture as a sign of weakness, as the easy way out. It isn't looked on as taking responsibility, it's looked on as shirking responsibility. I said "We've got to force her to this last decision."

Forced decisions were the order of the day for Fincher

Boss Films' ill-matched, briefly glimpsed but neatly effective post-production rod puppet, crawling on the ceiling (left) and attacking a victim by torchlight.



## DIRECTOR DAVID FINCHER

**“There were a number of people saying to me, ‘Look, you could have somebody pissing on a wall and call it ALIEN 3 and still do \$30 million worth of business.’”**



Fincher's suggestion to shave Weaver's head was a major factor in getting the job. Fincher may have been scared by KOJAK reruns as a child.

and his crew. It seems ironic that the final extraordinary image of Ripley, swan diving backwards into the flames, as the queen fetus erupts from her chest—one of the most complex images that s.f. cinema has delivered in a long time, was far from Fincher's original wishes.

“I didn't want to have the alien come out. I still don't like the idea of the alien emerging. Originally she falls backwards, standing on the gantry, with an explosion of blood on her chest and this thing pushes out. It's more of a stigmata and she falls backwards into it.

“There was a whole section where they actually cut three minutes out of the end sequence when Bishop comes and presents his case. I always wanted it to play like she listens to him and she's really tempted by it. Originally that scene played out much longer and there was a 40-second pause from the time he said 'Please trust us' and she made this decision and then she finally looked up at him and said 'No.'

“It wasn't as quick as it is now, I always liked that. I liked the idea of her making a choice as opposed to having the choice made for her. I never felt it was necessary to show the creature. We showed it to preview audiences and it was voted that we would do this. I was very much against this and dragged my feet and said 'I don't believe in it, I don't think it's important to see the monster but if we're going to do this then we're going to have to do something that has a little bit of top spin to it, something else going for it.

“No matter what cathartic experience we could expect from finally seeing the two strongest images from the first movie, the chest burster and the character of Ripley, if we left the movie with her choking on her tongue they would feel worse going out of the film than they do now.

“I said 'whatever happens she has to be in peace at the end.' It has to be a sigh rather than gritting teeth and sweat. So we talked about it and went over and shot this blue-screen element. We were shooting

that shot four days before the film opened, a completely ridiculous mess. I don't know if it works.”

More probing on the subject of cuts brings forth a low moan from Fincher. He cast mainly British thespians due to the lack of time available to find suitable American actors allowed to work in Britain. That said the cast included Paul McGann (Golic). McGann's onscreen talents have yet to be fully exploited in cinema but he is undoubtedly one of Britain's finest young actors, something that is not evident in his pared down role in ALIEN 3.

Fincher's original cut of ALIEN 3 ran at two hours seven minutes. Audiences now see a version some 13 minutes shorter. Somewhere amidst the reels of offcuts lies McGann's performance along with a major subplot. If Fincher gets his way they will be restored to the laserdisc version of the film.

“Oh God, if only you could read the original story. It just makes me weep. It was difficult for me to meet McGann because I was such a big fan. What happened was that test screening audiences of 18-

year-old kids in Long Beach, California, decided that they weren't interested in what happened to Golic. They weren't interested in what he gave the movie.

“People also wanted the movie to be shorter because you can play it more times a day. So a whole subplot was lost that to this day I feel is very important and certainly answers a lot of the critics questions about my inability to tell a story.

“The original idea was that Golic would believe that the creature was feeding on everybody else to leave himself and Ripley alive. That they were going to be sort of Adam & Eve and then that idea basically got cast aside because it was considered to be too strange. But that was the initial idea—why is the alien killing everybody off? The one deluded point of view in the whole thing is that it's weeding back all the human refuse to leave Golic & Ripley.”

The experience of making ALIEN 3 has undoubtedly been chastening for Fincher but it hasn't left him bitter. Rather it has been an expensive learning experience, a

\$50 million one to be precise, that has opened his eyes to the delicate sensibilities of Hollywood executives and their complete failure to see movies like the ALIEN series as anything other than 70mm cinematic Big Macs.

“They look at these movies like a franchise. There are people, who shall remain nameless, that I was bumping into as I was trying to put this thing together, who were putting the experience into a really interesting kind of perspective. They were saying 'Look, you could have somebody piss against a wall for two hours and call it ALIEN 3 and it's going to do \$30 million worth of business, you can't keep the people away. They're going to go the first night to see what it is.'

“Well, that's impetus to make the movie. That's not to say that 20th Century Fox didn't want to make a really fine film and they spent a lot of money trying to make it as good as it could possibly be but you can't buy pre-production time when you start shooting. Because things just get exponentially more complicated.

“I don't know, the current wisdom is, of course, that I make things exponentially more complicated but they just are. I probably should have walked away from the first week of shooting when there wasn't a script but there are extenuating circumstances.”

“They were 15 million dollars into just the production, not including all the money they spent on earlier versions of the script, other directors, sets and designs. To walk away from something like that, in this town at least, at that point is more detrimental to your career than to plow on with something you think needs a lot more work.

“We really only had four or five weeks of prep with the script that resembled what you saw. A lot of times we were fitting scenes into sets that we had already constructed. It was not the optimum way to make a movie.”

The conversation halts. Transatlantic buzzes fill the void as Fincher gathers his

# ALIEN<sup>3</sup>

*One viewer sees art value and even brilliance in Fincher's sequel.*

By Stephen  
M. Reese

Having done very poorly at the boxoffice, save its opening weekend, the third installment in the epic ALIEN series is now in video stores to stay. The critics' response to this film, both before its release and during its short run in theatres, was less than ecstatic, but don't believe the hype. ALIEN 3 is a triumph, dark and original, brooding and daring, possessed of more emotional aspect than either of its two highly acclaimed predecessors. The closing chapter in the most intriguing horror trilogy of Hollywood's history is a modern social commentary—cleverly layered and more cerebral than visceral. It's everything the ALIEN story was meant to be from the beginning.

The homeward-bound Ripley and crew don't quite make it back to Earth. Our heroine is left to fend for herself on an all-male prison planet dubbed Fiorina 161. The prisoners are all scum: rapists and murderers and thieves; but they've adopted religion, which ironically lends them an even harder edge. They despise Ripley as an outsider, even though she is the first female they have seen in half their lifetimes. And of course, no one believes her tale of an acid-spitting beast until the first heads start to roll.

But this is to be expected. What really hits home comes



With two audience-pleasing characters already dead, Henriksen's admirable android comes to a most ignominious end as well.

later, after the prisoners and Ripley become unlikely allies against the bloodthirsty creature. There are no illusions of camaraderie, none of the cooperation of ALIENS: they are working together to survive. Not a one could care less about his neighbor. It's the perfect analogy for life in the modern age.

To the surprise of many an action fan, the alien doesn't really appear until the end, when it goes on a massive killing spree. Instead, the real monster in this story is human nature. We see the perversity of our species' need to capture the alien for study, disregarding all human life in the struggle to get it.

We see the inner battle Ripley has to wage to deal with

the deaths of the people she risked her life to save, and her determination not to be ostracized by the convicts. Ripley is a very different person in ALIEN 3: gone is the strident feminist of ALIEN, the matriarchal destroyer of ALIENS. Here our heroine is not glorified; she's flesh and bone—human and vulnerable.

Ripley seems drained, gray, both immune to the horror of the alien and oblivious to any kind of optimism. The path to this state was paved by her roles in life from the outset: a pawn in her company's game, a witness to horrible slaughter, a mother torn by loss (of her own child, and then her "adopted" Newt, from ALIENS).

She began as an enthusiastic flight officer who thought everything was by the book and ends as a sad and pitiful woman, starved of hope and love.

ALIEN 3 is rife with religious imagery; there's far more to the analogy than Ripley's blatant Christ pose as she falls towards the molten lead in the film's final moments and the recurring stylized motif of the cross in the sets. The prisoners' rejection of their saviour at the outset is a direct parallel to Christ's first feedback from his people—denial. Ripley becomes the Christ figure as the film progresses, leading the convicts against their enemy with zeal and determination. She is the faith they could never grasp in their hol-



Ripley's warnings are greeted with disbelief by Fury 161's overseers.

low commitment to a religious life.

Of course, there are the plotters: Doubting Thomas, represented in the character of Superintendent Andres, and Francis "85" Aaron, Ripley's own pseudo-Judas, more preoccupied with saving himself than taking up the fight.

Our heroine counteracts this lethargy by offering the sacrifice of herself for the good of humanity; she is first thwarted by prisoner Dillon's call to arms, then succeeds ultimately in her final plunge. Only with *her* self-sacrifice can the humans be saved—not from the alien, but from themselves. The Company's desire for the queen serves as a physical manifestation of "sin."

There are other themes to be considered. The most prominent undercurrent has given the backbone of the ALIEN series its common element: modern Society's collapse. The story cleverly demonstrates how people's faith in their superiors and their society leads them to their own downfall. Company boy Aaron doesn't once doubt his institution's concern for his well being, and yet, to his superiors, he means little more than a piece of the industrial scrap that clogs Fury 161, and in death, indeed *becomes* part of



Fincher made his attitude clear when the planets' only likeable character (r), Medical Officer Clemens, is quickly slaughtered.

the planet's refuse. He is only one of the stereotypical authority figures whose idiocy is parodied in the ALIEN series.

Lieutenant Gorman, the inept commander of the marines in ALIENS, Company man Burke, whose earnest dedication to the aliens' defeat was proven a corporate guise. Even Ash, the science officer on a human spacecraft in ALIEN, is not even human. These characters are staples of societal foundations: the military, the government, the profit mongers, the scientific community—all cleverly ignoring the value of human life in the struggle for progress.

Each film in the trilogy was geared towards attacking modern society. Both ALIEN and ALIENS were movies made for their times: ALIEN, one of the first horror films to dare put a female in the survivor's shoes; ALIENS, a brilliant study of the collapse of American society, institution by institution.

In falling back on their conventions, the humans in those films could not hope to live, for the enemy they fought against was beyond such constrictions. It had evolved past the illusion of civilization to the pure science of survival: live, procreate, advance. The aliens' hive (a hostile version

of an ant or bee colony) was a far more successful social foundation than any of the humans', which held up not only to outside attack but was also devoid of destruction from within. The aliens had no Burkes or Aarons, as Ripley so eloquently put it, "Fucking each other over for a goddamn percentage."

One of the ALIEN series' finest accomplishments is that each film is completely unlike the others, much the antithesis of the LETHAL WEAPON or INDIANA JONES films, which are essentially duplicates of one another in different settings.

One of the areas in which ALIEN 3 forges ahead is with its breathtaking visual qualities: the camerawork is more art film than Hollywood horror flick. The beautiful lighting, stark Gothic sets and stunning cinematography are the vision of a young genius. Responsible for ALIEN 3's powerful look is 28-year-old director David Fincher, plucked, like Ridley Scott and James Cameron before him, from relative anonymity, and saddled with the enormous responsibility of wrapping up horror's most thought-provoking and stylish trilogy. Fincher succeeded not only in turning ALIEN 3 into a

continued on page 62

## DIRECTOR DAVID FINCHER

**“Plucked from relative anonymity, Fincher succeeded in turning ALIEN 3 into a *tour-de-force*, and stressed the emotional aspect over the kill factor. So why didn't anyone like it?”**

thoughts. An hour has passed and I've already exceeded my faxed list of questions ten fold. When I ask him what he's thinking of directing next you can almost see the smile spread across his face.

“Actually I'm talking about...[He gives a delighted chuckle]...Oh God, I'm actually talking about doing THE AVENGERS. I don't want to do it with Mel Gibson. I mean I love Mel Gibson but I have some ideas of my own. Maybe Charles Dance as Steed. Maybe I'll make a big, wide-screen, black and white version of THE AVENGERS. Do it in real 'mod' '60's style.”

Fincher stops and sighs as thoughts of his last ill-fated project come creeping back.

“Could you send me a copy of this? I need to know if I have to hide out in my apartment for the next six months. Looking at it from the role of communicator obviously in a lot of cases I didn't get my ideas across. I'm taking that rap but I'm so happy with the monsters and the sfx and the look of the film and the performances and what people were able to do with

whatever minimal prep they had. I'm very happy with that so I don't want to seem ungrateful. I'm not embarrassed by the film.

“If we failed to do one thing it was to take people out of their everyday life. Actually my dentist, as he was drilling my teeth, was giving me his thesis on the things wrong with this film and he said, 'You know, when you go out of this movie you haven't gotten away from AIDS, you haven't gotten away from the race riots, you haven't gotten away from your fear of other cultures.’

“We failed to give people the broad, safe entertainment that, in the United States at least, they seem to want. They want to go to the cinema and get away from it all. We tried to bring it down to right here and now, to make a movie about 1990. If we had just gone out and done a shoot 'em up we would have cheapened the thing in the long run. Instead we did something weird and fucked up out there. I just think in terms of the world boxoffice we may have chosen wrong.” □

Director David Fincher, from MTV to mega-budgets in one quick move.



# THE WANDERING KID

**SEX, GORE AND ULTRA-VIOLENCE.  
ROLL OVER WALT, IT'S A CARTOON.**

*By Todd French*

The imagery conveys a surreal, hypnagogic acceleration towards literal and sexual apocalypse: the phallic extensors of a newly invoked elder god spout city-razing laser beams; a woman explodes in a splattery mess of ropey intestines after being violated by a demonic beast; a high school athlete briefly transforms into a monster-bashing demi-god before flaming out with a vaguely orgasmic cry. This weird and startling melange occurs within a universe forever fixed on cyclical self-immolation and renewal. This is the universe of Hideki Takayama's UROTSUKIDOJI (THE WANDERING KID): LEGEND OF THE OVER-FIEND.

This ground-breaking Japanimation horror-erotica feature film has so far spawned six direct-to-video OVAs and is a sensation in its homeland. Now, thanks to Central Park Media (CPM), American animation-film buffs are finally getting an above ground taste of the ultra-controversial series. The NC-17 rated feature has set records on the art-house/midnight movie circuit and video release of the first three follow-up episodes (SUPER GOD'S BIRTH, SUPER GOD'S CURSE and FINAL HELL) are planned for this summer through Central Park's video arm, Anime 18.

"We are looking for anime material which really pushes the envelope," said CPM managing director John O'Donnell. This film offers imagery, sto-

**“With imagery and characters U. S. audiences don't associate with animation, and its high quality and cinematic approach, this is not just a cartoon, it's a major film.”**



Her love for the demonically transformed Nagumo leaves Akami carrying his seed, and destined to bear the world destroying Chojin.

ries, plotlines and characters that American audiences normally don't associate with animation. UROTSUKIDOJI offers great quality to the animation, to the design, and in its highly cinematic approach. It's not just a cartoon. It's truly a major film."

Based on the Manga (adult) comic books by Toshio Maeda, the first three episodes establish the basic premise that our world is divided into three separate, but interlocking,

realms: Humanity, Demons and Half-Beasts. It is prophesized that every 3000 years the Super God Chojin (The Over-fiend of the title) will appear and unite the disparate planes into a utopian "eternal land."

Delivered in a powerful, and jaw-dropping combo of Lovecraftian monster politics and triple-X sex, the central thrust of the near-breathless narrative is the quest for Chojin by main protagonist, and Half-

Beast hero, Amano, the Wandering Kid. Aided by his sister Megumi, and gremlin-like helper Kuroko, Amano battles various demonic baddies (who like hell the way it is) only to learn that the Chojin has manifested himself in the person of a geeky, hormone-driven teen, Nagumo, as yet unaware of his destiny. The Chojin's rebirth, it seems, portends anything but a pat harmonic convergence.

Western audiences may find Amano to hardly be an engaging, or conventional, protagonist. He shows little sympathy for humans and betrays a cocksure insouciance that allows him to misinterpret Chojin lore with an "I know I'm right" conviction that leads to a horrified "It's not supposed to be like this," when the consequences of his error are unveiled. Later episodes would even draw some unflattering parallels between Amano and a key villain. Both are all too willing to adopt an ends-justifies-the-means approach to their quests. In so doing both betray a core ruthlessness and disregard for human life that is chilling in the extreme.

Amano and Megumi, the apparent hero and heroine, are callous and immature, more notable for what they fail to accomplish than for what they do. For all their demon-slaying antics, they really never save anyone. In some cases they blindly accomplish just the opposite. Amano thinks nothing of smashing through the side of an office building, in the midst of his battle with demon



Akemi, Madonna of the cataclysm, cradled in the hand of her once-human lover, Nagumo. To save the Earth she pleads for death for them both.

champion Suikakuju, yet hundreds probably died from this thoughtless, if impressive, display of power. Megumi's advances to Nagumo trigger the awakening of the Super God and result in a massive slaughter in a hospital, all for the sake of her lust. At the end of FINAL HELL the two can only watch helplessly as Nagumo clears the cosmic slate.

The only major difference in attitude and methodology between the twosome, and that of many of the series most vile villains, is that Amano's final goal is a more positive one, and that he, and particularly his sister, will develop a more

"human" outlook as the series progresses.

"Amano and Megumi are not perfect," said Takayama, "but they are fighting for a better world. At first they are weak, but they become stronger. At first Amano sees himself as superior to ordinary mortals but he learns as he comes in contact with humanity."

Takayama does express concerns over Western acceptance of the series. "At the end of #3, (FINAL HELL) the Super God has destroyed everything. This can be seen as sad, and as the end of everything, but it can also be

seen as the beginning of everything. It's a very Buddhist idea, everything is born, grows, dies, and is then reborn to repeat that cycle. In WWII we had a military regime, and we were beaten. Now we've rebuilt into an economic power, but perhaps we will lose that too. If you look hard enough, you'll see that in UROTSUKIDOJI, history constantly repeats itself. I see this as optimistic. Western audiences may not."

To their credit Takayama's films seem to actually be saying something, in a vaguely Larry Cohenesque vein, about not trusting Messianic mes-

### Can you tell your Chojin from your Jyujinkai?

Then you may want to check out the list (on page 43) of the major UROTSUKIDOJI saga characters that are discussed in this article.

sengers, but the very Asian concepts of birth, destruction, and rebirth may be lost on American audiences who will see only the politically incorrect body heat (human and otherwise) and adolescent sex/power/violence fantasies. Technically the film's lightning fast wipes, dissolves, odd-angled shots, Hitchcockian quick cuts, zooms, 360-degree overhead pans, etc., will dazzle animation and film fans alike. Even the latest Disney efforts don't scream like this of the inherent possibilities of the bonding of film and anime. But Disney never showed us the Little Mermaid's tits, or BEAUTY in BEAST-ial coital embrace. It remains to be seen if the average American viewer will ever get past these revelations. Are they ready for what could turn out to be the BASIC

Gym teacher Ms. Togami (r) transforming into the demon Yoki. Akemi (l) cowers at Yoki's caress.



## INSTINCT of 'toons?

Takayama is actually bemused by the nefarious celebrity status the series has brought him. "I really had no idea I would be making such violent and erotic films. When MW films asked me if I was interested in the material I simply saw a chance to do something that you couldn't possibly dream of doing in a live action movie."

After finishing Japan's Technical Animation School Takayama had initially planned on pursuing a career in three-dimensional animation. Discovering that his prospects in his chosen field were virtually nil (only one company was experimenting with 3-D) the 20-year-old Takayama signed with Toei, Japan's biggest film company. He spent 10 years doing theatrical animation for them. He later joined the cel staff of the seminal '70s Sci-Fi anime film, *SPACE CRUISER YAMATO*. The highly touted, and enormously successful, battle-starship saga pulled audiences in with its action, but entranced them with its humanistic storylines and anti-war philosophy. Takayama still considers his involvement in the *YAMATO* movie "the best work I've done."

Takayama is the first to agree that part of *UROT-SUKIDOJI*'s success is due to the success of *YAMATO*. Before *YAMATO* came out most Japanese animation was simply outclassed by its bigger, well-heeled and more technically proficient American counterpart. "Part of its popularity



Amano engages Yoki in aerial combat, after the demon rapes his sister Megumi.

was that it had a philosophy and theme: What is peace? What is a human being?" said Takayama. "We also wanted a philosophy in our series. It may be only 30% of the film's content, instead of 70%, but I think if you look, you'll definitely find it."

Series producer Yasuhito Yamaki clearly agrees with his director. "The question in the film is, 'What saves the human being?' The answer is love. Yes, there is a great deal of violence and lust in humanity, but it can still redeem itself through love. I think *UROT-SUKIDOJI* is a bit like Kubrick's *FULL METAL JACKET*. There is a great deal of destruction, but ultimately the film is a very effective condemnation of war."

While episode #3, *FINAL HELL*, seemed to be an emphatic wiping clean of the cosmic slate, in preparation for the "Eternal Land," episode #4, *PRAYER FOR THE BIRTH OF AN INSANE KING*, brings new

qualities that may be even more effective than its stunning predecessors. *PRAYER* is basically a prequel to the events of #2 and #3, though its exact position in a true chronology would be hard to fix.

With a storyline from original strip creator Maeda, *PRAYER* introduces the Insane King into the cosmic equation along with new, sympathetic characters and a powerful, and disturbing, metaphor for the AIDS epidemic.

Episode #4 opens in WWII. Der Fuhrer himself observes the failed attempts of Reich scientist Munnchhausen I to secure a Wehrmacht victory via conquest of the three realms. Munnchhausen's reward for his efforts on behalf of the fatherland is a bullet from a brown shirt. This does not occur, however, before he has uncovered the existence of a malign diety called The Insane King (or Kyoo). His son (Munnchhausen II of course) inherits

his father's knowledge and the green, glowing stone that supplied the energy source of his mad pater's quest.

As an adult, Munnchhausen II attempts to repeat his demented parent's scheme, the invoking of the Insane King to stop the Chojin from uniting the tripartite realms. To do this the blood of the Super God is needed. Munnchhausen II arranges for Nagumo's naive cousin, Takiyaki, to receive a transfusion from his relative. Chojin blood basically turns mortals into supra-beasts for a brief,

albeit, lethal period. By seducing the pure Takiyaki into giving in to his baser instincts Munnchhausen hopes to have the youth eliminate future Chojin, Nagumo, and pave the way for the return of the Kyoo. Takiyaki's struggles to retain his humanity, his growing love for Megumi and the certain tragedy of his future (with its possibly AIDS-related inspiration) allow him to become a far more sympathetic (and identifiable) character than Amano, who here drops to near secondary status in the story. Without stinting on the salacious/supernatural kicks of the previous entries, Takayama and Co. have added some much needed human sensibilities to a series whose sensibilities were, in the main, anything but human.

On one level episodes 3 & 4 are about the tragic results of the collision of three distinct and diametrically opposed family units: Amano and his sister, idealistic believers in the

Left: Amano's sister Megumi pleads with her soon-to-be non-human lover Takiyaki. (Center): Megumi cries in anguish over having been forced to kill Takiyaki.





**“It's a level of sexual imagery and violence that shocks people who think of animation as Walt Disney. This isn't aimed at kids, it's adult-oriented material.”**

advent of a Brave New Chojin World; Munnchausen II, and his father, fanatical Kyoo devotees eager to embrace and accelerate the second coming of the destroyer of all worlds; human kin Nagumo and Takiyaki, annihilating teenagers, dupes and objects of all the other characters' hopes and desires. It's these disparate, fatally charged interpersonal relationships that provide the episodes with their strong degree of pathos and lyricism.

Takayama's splashy, horror anime set-pieces are once again gloriously evocative, sensual, repugnant, beautiful and ceaselessly imaginative. In some instances—Takiyaki's seduction-nightmare on a ghostly phosphorescent lattice of corpses, the cousins battering each other at the center of a swirling twister of sacrificial blood—the visuals have a ravishing transcendence that is like nothing the Occidental medium has produced.

Takayama also brings depth to Takiyaki's "I Was A Teenage Incubus" dilemma by giving the character enough inner firepower to keep the issue in suspense. Nagumo's progression from horny sophomore to ground zero Yog Sothoth seemed fairly predestined. Takiyaki's heroic struggles to escape Munn-

Munnchausen I's idea of entertainment.

chausen's plans for him take on real, tragic dimension. No mean feat considering the often mind-blowing flippancy that is typical of many Japanimation creations. When Takiyaki does finally succumb to all-out Chojin rebirth it's truly a sad moment: a character we've come to like is gone.

Curiously, Takayama feels that some of the series' stylistic-thematic inspirations came from one particular mid '80s American genre film. "Originally, a lot of the basic ideas came from western culture," said Takayama. "Look at John Carpenter's THE THING; that had some of the same ideas. That was a very popular film among Japanese animation buffs, and very influential on Japanimation. It really inspired me, made me want to see just how far I could go with animation."

Still, that film was a flop in America and Takayama sees that as being only one of the differences in viewpoint that may keep Westerners from finding it possible to fully embrace his creations. "I think one of the big differences between Japan and America is Catholicism and Jesus Christ." Said Takayama. "We don't have that Judeo-Christian ethic in Japan, and that difference could be a critical one. The word prayer in PRAYER FOR THE BIRTH OF AN INSANE KING has nothing to do with the Bible, the meaning in Chinese Kanji is very different.

"Similarly, we use the six-pointed star in the film and I can only hope that Jewish people are not offended. In Japan that symbol is used to ward off evil. In the beginning of #4 we see Hitler and the six-pointed star together, and there is certainly a potential problem there. My greatest fear is that people just may not understand."



Top: Sex and Lovecraft/Giger imagery. Below: Megumis' attempts to reason with her demon captor, Yogi, result in her rape at its hands...and tentacles.



One of the main reasons behind the success of the series, and extreme Japanimation in general, Takayama feels, is Japan's huge adult comic-fandom, and the freedom from censorship offered by the country's burgeoning video business of seven or eight years ago. "Many Japanese men read comics," Takayama said. "That's an indication that they tend to place themselves into the story emotionally; they tend to go into the characters more than most European or American fans. The animation from Disney or Europe is not that sort of film; the

animation from Europe is more like fiction, whereas, in Japanese animation, we can be a person, a character. Even in their '30s or '40s readers (or watchers) can still get into it."

O'Donnell echoes Takayama's belief that Japan's comic fans had much to do with the acceptance of the initial film and the subsequent video presentations. "Japan never fell into the way of thinking that when you turned fifteen, you had to stop reading comic books and watching animation," said O'Donnell. "Why do we have that practice in our country?"



Center: The Japanese poster art for **LEGEND OF THE OVERFIEND, UROTSUKIDOJI Parts 1 through 3**, now on video from Central Park Media. Above: Parts 4 & 5, **DEMON WOMB**.



Above: Part 5, **SHINJUKU SKYSCRAPER BATTLE**, the nefarious Munchausen II gazes down on (l to r) Nagumo and Akemi, Amano and Takiyaki, and (center) Megumi as sacrifice.

Like Takayama, O'Donnell also believes the series will catch on in the U.S. home video market but, as it did in Japan, it must start in the theaters. "If we don't do a theatrical release we don't do justice to this; it's extremely important to get it out there because of the acclaim it will win. If you look at the overall tenor in America, everything is being challenged; you've got to take a stand.

"When we first started the UROTSUKIDOJI films," said Takayama, "video tape was starting to become a more common business. Since video is not for the mass pub-

lic, but more for one person, it can be more grotesque and erotic. Our producers (MW films) felt that more violent and erotic things would become more acceptable to the people in this form; you can't watch these things at the movie house, but you can see them at home."

At first the fledgling company found many distributors balking at carrying the controversial title. Only 3,000 copies of the first chapter (**SUPER GOD'S BIRTH**) were initially distributed. Relying strictly on word of mouth it soon became a best-selling title. Even Takayama himself was aston-

ished at their rental popularity. "The average number of rentals per tape for #1 was about 300," he recalled. From there the series grew exponentially with each new release.

Takayama explained that the original six Maeda books had a number of overlapping plots and a number of more mature secondary characters rather than the almost exclusively youthful combatants of the film series. MW films changed the main protagonists from their age in the Maeda books, (roughly 13-15), to about high school age. When CPM viewed even this as too

young for stateside distribution, the protagonists moved up to college age. Takayama also chose to set the films in Tokyo because he sees the city as "the ultimate symbol of consumerism and materialism."

After years of being conditioned to view Japanimation as half-assed space operas and mech-suited soap operas, CPM's O'Donnell feels that the time is ripe to introduce the risk-taking qualities of anime, to the general American public. "This is not pornography, but its sexual imagery and violence will shock people who think of animation as beginning and ending with Walt Disney. This is closer to **BLUE VELVET**, a legitimate, above-board exercise in cinematic imagination, done by pros."

"Of course you're going to get the moralists and conservatives," said O'Donnell. "Fine, let's have this one battle and settle it once and for all: this is not porno. Cartoons are not automatically for children. If you are a parent and you let your 8-year-old see this, shame on you. We expect a

The transformed Nagumo, now in full Chojin-Father form, lays waste to the realms of humans, demons and beasts in preparation for the Chojin's arrival.



major controversy; we'll help create it. People must realize you can't have this blindspot that adults aren't allowed to look at cartoons because they are somehow immature."

O'Donnell, a former Japanese Lit-Economics major involved in Nippon-American cultural interface since '66, predicts, and welcomes, the kind of conservative "moral" backlash which could make UROTSUKIDOJI a contemporary *cause celebre*. "I believe people will see how unique UROTSUKIDOJI is, and appreciate it for being a milestone in the animated market. We have a story and plot development that is sophisticated and complex; we have a series of characters who are memorable, and it's easy to get involved in their lives. We also have a level of sexual imagery and violence that really shocks people who think of animation as Walt Disney. This particular piece is not aimed for children, it is adult-oriented, and we will warn our audience that it should be treated as an NC-17 product."

Japanimation has long explored areas where Bluthian angels would fear to tread and embraced what might be labeled "Disney for the Id." There are times when its ruminations on the darkest fantasies of sexuality and violence belie a misogyny and almost pathologically juvenile sadism that's withering. Some Japanimation, such as VIOLENCE JACK: EVIL TOWN, offer a dispiriting and harrowing view of humanity that runs the gamut from the slaughter of

Series director, Hideki Takayama.



**“If you are a parent and let your kid see this, shame on you. We expect a controversy, but this is not porno and cartoons are not automatically for children.”**



No possible influence is bypassed as Black Magic ceremonies are introduced into the proceedings. A good example of the series cinematic imagery.

men, women and children to rape and cannibalism.

Producer Yamaki feels that his films should not be viewed as anti-woman and misogynistic, a label frequently given them. "Akemi has violence (rape) perpetrated against her, but if people will follow the whole story they will see that she transcends that to become a Madonna figure. Yes, bad things happen to her, but she overcomes them. In the American Academy Award winner, THE ACCUSED, they show the rape scene. It was necessary for the story. The same is true here."

Yamaki feels the films exhibit more than a little of his personal philosophy as well. "I like the science fiction of the '60s, I believe in the "hyper-human", something beyond mankind that is controlling our actions and destiny. I realize some people will see only the sex and violence, but all humans have those urges from the moment they're born, you can't deny them. In the second film there's a boy, Nikki, who tries to become more than human. Nikki tries to live by his desires, and he can't win. Perhaps all human beings are bound to fail, maybe that's

what's so sad about mankind. We are doomed to never reach the goals we aspire to."

There is something ineffably courageous about the Nippon taste for open-ended nihilism in their Touchstone-colored fulminations of the flesh. In their exploration of the kind of ambiguous, pulp-taboo primer that most live-action films don't come close to touching, Japanimation aces are iconoclastically redefining the boundaries of a field that deals in the most emptily dappled of play-it-safe visions.

But what can you say about a series where the ultimate horror is killing the one you love in order to save the Earth's destroyer?

UROTSUKIDOJI and its sequels are unlikely to move through fandom circles with any less controversy than they will with the general public. Fans will either get caught up in Takayama's breathless storytelling and apocalyptic imagery, or be driven away by the series' penchant for depicting women as either Holy Mothers, sword-and-ray-gun-wielding babes or pliable sexual pincushions, and at times all three. A middle ground just ain't out there. □

## UROTSUKIDOJI

### Principal Character Cast

In an effort to lessen confusion for readers who are largely or totally unfamiliar with the UROTSUKIDOJI saga, we offer this list of major characters who are discussed within the article.

**NAGUMO** (episodes 1-7) Your standard shy, horny teen attending a private Yokohama University. After a seemingly fatal auto crash, he discovers that he is, in fact, the demonic father-half of THE CHOJIN, a God destined to return every 3000 years to reconcile our world's tripartite parallel realms of HUMANS, MAKAI (monster Demons) and JYU-JINKAI (man-Beasts). When not fighting nascent monsterhood, Nagumo awkwardly courts...

**AKEMI** (ep. 1-7) The most popular girl in her school and captain of the gymnastics team, Akemi is also the destined MOTHER OF THE CHOJIN (though only after a century-long pregnancy cycle!). After her coupling with Nagumo, she is transformed into a ghostly madonna and safely cloistered away until the Chojin arrives.

**TAKIYAKI** (ep. 4-5) Nagumo's innocent cousin. After an ill-considered transfusion from his relative, he becomes a demi-Chojin under the control of the despicable MUNNCHAUSEN II. Pitted against Nagumo, Takiyaki fights desperately to retain his dwindling humanity, but dies at the hand of inter-species love interest MEGUMI.

**MUNNCHAUSEN II** (ep. 4-7) fanatical villain devoted to blocking the arrival of the Chojin. In later episodes he is renamed FAUST and continues his nefarious ways.

**JYUJINKAI AMANO** (ep. 1-7) Series protagonist, The Wandering Kid. He has been searching for Chojin for over 300 years without ever really understanding the full horrific import of the Super-god's advent until the apocalyptic finale of FINAL HELL (ep. 3).

**MEGUMI** (ep. 1-6) Amano's sister starts out as a monster/demon-bashing ditz but acquires more dimension via her doomed relationship with Nagumo's cousin Takiyaki.

**MAKAI SUIKAKUJYU** (ep. 2-3) Amano's chief demon foe in the first trilogy. Unlike Amano, Suikakujyu realizes that the Super-god's return will mean annihilation of all three realms. □

## Terminator Too

# NEMESIS

### Director Albert Pyun's Return to Cyborg Territory

By Max J. Alvarez

Sixty miles from Los Angeles, in San Bernardino County, stand the disorienting ruins of the old Kaiser Steel plant. Once a bustling manufacturer of WWII ship steel, the dormant facility has found a second career as a studio backlot for veteran genre director Albert Pyun's science fiction/action film NEMESIS.

What was previously a concentration of factory architecture is now a post-apocalyptic Los Angeles of the year 2020. Piles of rubble and coal surround overturned, gutted and partially demolished brick buildings. The remains of a rusting pipeline pierces the dusty, grey air. One seasoned crew member caustically remarks how no living creatures—not even insects—can be found anywhere in the vicinity. Indeed, the only signs of nature at the Kaiser plant are a

French kickboxer Olivier Gruner as Alex Rains, cybergenetic cop specializing in robotic-generated crimes.



This is what your fashion-conscious cyborg is wearing. Gruner and his cyborg opponents hard at work in Los Angeles, circa 2027.

few scattered sunflowers and an abundance of overgrown grass.

NEMESIS is not the first feature film to utilize the uniquely disturbing locale, nor is it director Albert Pyun's first project here. The foundry was in the process of being dismantled when Hollywood location scouts, impressed with the decaying industrial age ambiance, selected it for sequences of ROBOCOP and TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY. Last year, Pyun used the eerie site briefly for portions of DOLL MAN but now intends to take greater advantage of the cinematic qualities and multimillion-dollar production values the plant has to offer.

NEMESIS features French kick-boxing champion Oli-

er Gruner along with Tim Thomerson, Merle Kennedy, Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa, Brion James and Deborah Shelton. Gruner is the official discovery of the film's producers, Imperial Entertainment.

NEMESIS is his second film in the company's ongoing program to groom him to join the elite circle of international action stars. So far he seems to meet the necessary job requirements: he is a former Navy S.E.A.L., stands a very solid six foot tall, has blue eyes and possesses one of those accents fans of Arnold and Jean-Claude often find so appealing.

In NEMESIS, Gruner portrays Alex Rains, a partially cybergenetic undercover cop

who specializes in "robotic-generated" crimes for the Los Angeles Police Department. After a bloody confrontation with HAMMERHEAD cyborg terrorists, Rains receives replacement surgery which renders him less human than before, so he retires from the police force and becomes a database smuggler. When Rains is wounded in another violent encounter, his damaged body is reconstructed by ex-boss Farnsworth (Thomerson), an evil cyborg who has installed a time bomb in Rains's heart so that the latter will be forced to carry out a dangerous top-secret mission.

Eventually Rains meets a member of the supposed terrorist organization (SPACE RANGERS' Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa) who tells him that HAMMERHEAD is actually a band of freedom fighters, out to save mankind from a cyborg conspiracy. A major component of this plan is to substitute cyborg duplicates for key humans. Amongst those already replaced is Farnsworth.

"It's really about this essential man who has made his living in a very bad way, realizing that he's done it very badly, and is looking for some kind of redemption through the course of the movie," observed Pyun between setups at the Kaiser plant. "Each action event pushes him a little closer to

understanding where he fits in the world and why he should be alive, why he should exist."

Pyun is of modest height, stocky frame, and has a mane of long, flowing black hair that distinguishes him from most movie directors. A San Diego native, Pyun held numerous production jobs in the mid-1970s and later became a film editor for the defunct exploitation distributor Dimension Pictures. In 1982, after several years of working on television commercials, Pyun directed his first feature, a surprise hit in the then burgeoning sword and sorcery sub-genre, *THE SWORD AND THE SORCERER*. Video store regulars will recognize many of the more than a dozen movies he has directed since then, a decidedly uneven mix of interesting misfires, like *RADIOACTIVE DREAMS*. He seemed on the upswing with the futuristic Van Damme actioner *CYBORG*, a hit for Cannon Films, and was quickly announced for their major production of *SPIDER-MAN*. The disastrous *CAPTAIN AMERICA*, and Cannon's own near financial collapse, brought that streak to an end. *NEMESIS* is a solid step up from Pyun's recent films which have largely been direct-to-video dreck like *DOLLMAN* and *BLOOD MATCH*. Besides his directorial contribution to *NEMESIS*, Pyun also wrote the film's script under the highly effective *nom de plume* of Rebecca Charles.

Few, if any, Pyun films have won critical accolades and Pyun alludes to considerable dissatisfaction over his lack of creative control on previous projects. With *NEMESIS*, the situation could finally be improving. "It's the first time what I wrote is actually getting onto the screen and with any luck at all it will not get cut up."

The Kaiser plant is unquestionably the most dramatic location being used for



Cyborg Michelle (Pyun's male characters sport feminine names in the the film and vise versa) after a less-than-successful encounter with barely human cop Rains.

*NEMESIS*, if not quite the prettiest (the crew also filmed in Los Angeles, Arizona and Hawaii). On this particular day, Olivier Gruner is being relentlessly pursued by evil cyborgs Tim Thomerson and Brion James, two villains neatly dressed in business suits who are brandishing MP5 German semi-automatic weapons.

Railroad tracks separate two sets where Pyun and his crew of 45 are filming one of many athletic action pieces. On one side of the tracks is constructed a fragment of a four-story building for a scene in which Gruner is trapped by his pursuers. The ever-resourceful hero escapes by blasting bullet holes through the top floor of the set and jumping through the opening to the floor below, repeating the procedure until he is trapped again in a room on the first floor. The scene resumes inside a small black tent on the other side of the tracks where a bullet-ridden interior set has been built for Gruner and Thomerson to continue their epic gunfight.

Boxes of severed artificial limbs and various other body parts indicate the intensity of the *NEMESIS* special effects. Despite an extremely tight (though undisclosed) budget, Pyun's movie is going to incorporate stop-and-go-motion, animation, computer-

generated imagery and elaborate on-set effects. In just a few days, for example, a missile is scheduled to be fired at Gruner, but Pyun has other compelling effects up his sleeve. "Down the road we have somebody who's going to be doing a full body burn with no protection, just skin," said Pyun. "They're entirely on fire. No suit, nothing. Just the gell. That's a major, major deal, so obviously those are things we'll be using 12 cameras on."

The special effects team for *NEMESIS* has staggering credentials and Pyun has arranged the production schedule to accommodate their high-paying studio assignments. Terry Frazee, the special effects supervisor, has *STAR TREK VI*, *GHOST*, *THE BLOB* (1988 remake), and *BLADE RUNNER* to his credit. Special makeup effects supervisor David Barton has dabbled in *HOOK*, *TERMINATOR 2*, *ALIENS*, *BATMAN RETURNS* and *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*. Meanwhile, over at Fantasy II in Burbank (see accompanying article), Oscar-winner Gene Warren, Jr. (*TERMINATOR 2*) is supervising the intricate miniature work for the film's climactic cyborg fight.

As the sun begins to set in the late afternoon, Pyun and his entourage commute to the other side of the railroad

tracks for the next big action scene. In the vicinity of an abandoned water treatment vat are the ruins of a toppled building where chunks of concrete dangle from rusted spikes. Even though the structure appears likely to implode upon a moment's notice, the *NEMESIS* crew proceeds undeterred. Two "snorkelift" machines raise Pyun, Gruner and nine crewmembers to the top of the building where the director and his French leading man proceed to stage yet another key element in Alex Rains's quest for escape from his cyborg attackers. From

down below, Gruner is seen running up the steep incline of the toppled structure, a handheld camera shadowing his every move. In a few moments there is a shattering special effects explosion. The scene is completed, the post-apocalyptic ruins are now shrouded in darkness and a day's work is merely beginning.

Although Pyun likens the visual style of *NEMESIS* to that of "a Rembrandt paint-

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Rains is captured by Farnsworth's seemingly unarmed cyborg cohort. Effects by David Barton's Modus Effects.



# NEMESIS

## EFFECTS

### Gene Warren's *Fantasy II* Delivers Budget Animation

By Max J. Alvarez

The *Fantasy II* special effects house where many of the NEMESIS cyborgenic images will come to life is situated in a small, undistinguished building somewhere in Burbank's industrial district. There are no flashy neon signs nor sprawling billboards displaying previous hit films whose effects were contributed by *Fantasy II*. The only point of reference is a hand-painted street number above the front door.

Nonetheless, this disheveled, unmarked building contains both a 9,000-square-foot production facility and 6,000-square foot shooting stage where epics the size of *TERMINATOR 1&2*, *THE ABYSS*, *GREMLINS*, *TREMORS*, AND *PET SEMATARY* had all, or part, of their special effects created. *Fantasy II* also has proven accommodating to modestly budgeted, effects-driven films and has maintained a relationship with NEMESIS director Albert Pyun that dates back to his *CAPTAIN AMERICA*, *CYBORG* and *THE ALIEN FROM L.A.* pictures.

*Fantasy II* was brought in to design the effects for the film's setpiece, a final showdown between good cyborg Alex Rain (Olivier Gruner) and evil cyborg Farnsworth (Tim Thomerson). The dramatic combat takes place aboard a cargo plane and features actor Gruner battling it out with the skeletal cyborg remains of Farnsworth. The skeleton has latched onto the airborne plane and has forced its way into the hold in an attempt to destroy Rain. The skeleton then pulls Rain through the door of the cargo plane and tears off part of Rain's face. Because Rain

is a robocop, the unattractive injury doesn't prevent him from carrying out his heroic battle against the villainous cyborg.

This sequence incorporates miniatures, stop and go-motion and other forms of trick photography, which are presenting something of a challenge to the *Fantasy II* effects people. When Gruner's disfigurement occurs, a Gruner miniature—facially deformed, shirtless, muscular, and tattooed—is substituted, and the effects team is required to ensure that the body movements will be as human-like as possible. The true test will be in deceiving audiences likely to notice stilted human movement more than they would stilted cyborg movement.

"There's probably more shots with a human puppet—the Olivier puppet—than has probably ever been done in a film," stated Gene Warren Jr., visual effects director of NEMESIS, who in March was one of four visual effects men to win an Oscar for *TERMINATOR 2*.

The first phase of this complex effects scene involved the construction of a cargo plane interior set in one of the *Fanta-*



Master animator "Sneaky" Pete Kleinow brought life to the Farnsworth skeleton's airplane-bound battle with Rains, and stayed with the meager effects budget.

*sy II* shooting stages. Olivier Gruner was brought in to act out a fight with a nonexistent opponent (later to be added by the effects team). *Fantasy II* filmed Gruner with a VistaVision camera using a slow, fine-grain Kodak 2248 stock, the results producing a negative in which each frame was equivalent to the size of two 35mm frames laid sideways with eight, rather than four, perforations. Inserts of Gruner were filmed with a standard handheld 35mm four-perf camera.

After creating the miniatures, *Fantasy* rear-projected the Gruner footage (plates) in VistaVision and then photographed the Farnsworth/skeleton cyborg in front of the screen using a 35mm four-perf camera. Miniature portions of the cargo plane set were placed in front of the plates to lend a more multidimensional effect to the sequence. Adding

to the complications of the scene was director Pyun's preference for the handheld images to extend to the overall stop/go-motion effects. "The VistaVision plates we locked off and shot in VistaVision, but when we recomposited putting the cyborg in, then we did all of the handheld look during the composite," Warren explained. "It's all programmed into the computer controls on the camera so that everything gets a blur like live-action photography."

Warren believes you would have to go back nearly three decades—to Ray Harryhausen's famous skeleton duel in *JASON AND THE ASTRONAUTS* (1963)—to find another special effects stop-motion scene with as much complexity as this one.

On another *Fantasy II* shooting stage, director of photography and stop-motion animator Peter Kleinow is supervising the exterior scenes of the cargo plane. The miniature fiberglass model, measuring eight by ten feet, is actually an A6 fighter originally built for John Milius' *FLIGHT OF THE INTRUDER* but has now been redesigned by Warren and Jerry Pojawa. The model hangs in front of a blue screen from a track that moves forward and laterally. Below the model is a go-motion rig containing truck and tilt rotation and which will be attached to the feet of the

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The Farnsworth skeleton, still clutching Rains' mechanical arm, falls from the plane into the volcano below at the conclusion of their combat.



# KNIGHTS

## PYUN'S BACK WITH ROBOTIC DEJA-VU

By Chuck  
Crisafulli

Director Albert Pyun never gets tired. As soon as he vanquished the evil cyborgs in his NEMESIS project, he went ahead and created a new batch of maladjusted robo-men to terrorize the citizens of the future in what is almost a companion feature, KNIGHTS. The King's Road release stars old pros Kris Kristofferson and Lance Henriksen, as well as five-time world kickboxing champion Kathy Long in her feature debut.

Filmed in the high mountains of Utah, KNIGHTS unfolds as a classic future-myth of the battle between good and evil forces. A "Creator" has given life to an army of supposedly peace-keeping cyborgs, but a technological glitch allows them to take sustenance from human blood, rather than the synthetic fuel originally designed for them. The cyborgs become roving robotic vampires, feasting on human victims. Henriksen, familiar to most science fiction fans as Bishop from the ALIEN sequels, stars as Job, the leader of the marauding 'borgs.'

The Creator, aware that his creations have gone awry, gives life to one more cyborg, Gabriel, whose task is to terminate the evil robots and restore order to the war-scarred world. Genre fans and country music fans alike may be surprised to find gravelly-voiced Kris Kristofferson in the role of the avenging angel. Although Kristofferson appears to be an odd casting choice on the part of director Pyun, the singer has had a fair number of rough-and-tumble film roles in pictures like THE LEGEND OF PAT GARRET AND BILLY THE KID, CONVOY and VIG-



Five-time world kickboxing champion Cathy Long and songwriter/singer/actor Kristofferson on location in the high mountains of Utah for KNIGHTS.

ILANTE FORCE. With a bit of help from the makeup effects crew, Kristofferson makes for a believable, battle-ready protagonist.

Gabriel is set loose in the world with a only a year's worth of fuel, state-of-the-art fighting skills and a mandate to put an end to the carnage Job's forces are inflicting on the populace. He soon finds the human Nea, portrayed by Long, about to be victimized. After they share a moment of glory coming to each other's rescue, they become an inseparable team.

The lead role of Nea is a fair plum for kickboxer Long, who was previously seen by film audiences doing stunt work in DEATH BECOMES HER and providing the Catwoman's flying kicks in BATMAN RETURNS. KNIGHTS provided Long with her first dramatic role in a feature film, which she believes was a great way to start. "It was a blast. Being up in the mountains was fantastic. Not to mention that this is my first feature film and I got a lead."

Albert Pyun is famous for his rigorous, speedy shooting

schedules, which one may find to be an uncomfortable way for a novice actress to break in. But Long said that the shoot remained pleasant for her. "It went so quickly. They jokingly refer to Albert as a 'television director, because he worked so fast and got so much done every day. In this case, it made everything I had to do much easier. I had enough time to work out the fight scene choreography with my trainer Eric Nolan and when we shot those scenes, they went very

smoothly. The character as written is close to who I am, which made it really fun for me and a lot easier than it might have been. I've been told before that I have a natural talent for acting, but I don't know. This role was just something I enjoyed doing."

As the plot of KNIGHTS thickens, Gabriel and Nea are overtaken by Job's soldiers. Gabriel is blown apart and Nea is captured. Once at the center of Job's camp, Nea must fight through several bloody battles to get to her brother and to recover what's left of Gabriel. The movie's final, pivotal fight scene is a high-stakes encounter between Nea and Job.

Throughout the film, both makeup effects and mechanical effects helped turn the human actors into realistic cyborgs. As a full-blooded human character, Kathy Long did not have to work directly with the makeup effects crew, however, she said that by the end of the picture, the makeup people were taking longer and longer to apply the battle scars that she collects throughout the film.

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In one of the film's almost non-stop action sequences, Long unmounts an attacking cyborg with a spectacular flying kick.



# KUNG FU RASCALS

*Steve Wang's ultimate special effect—  
a no-budget movie that's fun*

By Chuck  
Crisafulli

"Just another day of kung fu fighting," said capable hero Chen Chow Mein, shortly before he pummels the evil Sheriff of Ching Wa County. Martial arts film fans should be satisfied by the intense display of dropkicks and karate chops in that battle, but it's unlikely that even the most diehard kung fu buffs will be familiar with chicken-style kick-boxing, paper fan duels and imperial wig torture, all of which figure prominently in the slapstick/action feature KUNG FU RASCALS.

Effects fans may be familiar with Steve Wang's name from his work on such impressive vehicles as BEETLEJUICE, GREMLINS II and PREDATOR. He is also the man responsible for the new and improved cape and cowl in BATMAN RETURNS. Wang got a chance to sit behind the cameras when he co-directed the well-received comic science fiction film THE GUYVER with Screaming Mad George. But KUNG FU RASCALS is Wang's first project of the heart, and he poured all his creative juices into it, serving as producer, director, co-writer, editor, fight director and, to top things off, Chen Chow Mein, most competent of the



Director/co-writer/star Steve Wang (l) as Chen Chow Mein, with Ted Smith as the Evil Bamboo Man.

Rascals.

The film was shot from September of 1989 to July 1990, with a cast and crew of special effects friends and acquaintances that Wang had developed through his work on larger projects. Using hand-held Super 8 cameras and an uncanny knack for figuring out low-budget methods to achieve high-quality effects, Wang managed to put together a film that combines the zany chaos of a Monty Python sketch with the knock-down adventure of a satisfying chop-socky flick.

A well-crafted piece of zero budget entertainment, KUNG FU RASCALS can compete effectively with major studio releases. Watching it is a lot more fun than watching HUDSON HAWK.

The story opens as Chen makes his way through a dark forest, battling off demons to protect his stolen prize, the Sunstone map of Kowloon. He hopes that he and his two Rascal comrades, Lao Aee and Reepo, can use the stone to defeat their nemesis, the Bamboo Man from Kapow. The Bamboo Man assigns Raspmutant the Mad Monk, a demented pigman, to track down and retrieve the stone. The monk enlists the aid of the very-smirking evil Sheriff of Ching Wa County and his henchman, the Funny

Dar Ling and the comically inarticulate Ba Foon. An Old Wise Guy helps the Rascals figure out that the sunstone will help lead them to the revered "power most big," but before they can get to it they must fight off Bumbling Ninjas and escape the clutches of the Imperial Torture Master.

It may sound complicated and like any great martial arts film, it is. But the mythic proportions of the story always serve to set up either strong action sequences or uproarious humor. The film stars



Slightly redressed rocks from the seashore became the mountain-top caves the Rascals hide out in from the gigantic Meta Spartan.

Wang, Johnny Saiko Espiritu, Troy Fromin, Ted Smith, Wyatt Weed and Les Claypool. Almost everyone in the cast did double duty in some other capacity—Weed handled visual effects, Claypool scored the music for the film, Espiritu sings the theme song over the closing credits and Smith did work in two pivotal creature suits. Mike Bastings served as the director of photography.

Marian Pacas as Chen Chow Mein's love interest, the sweet Kimono Girl





## HARRYHAUSEN ON A BUDGET

**“For the battle with the giant stone wargods Wang sculpted two creature suits and utilized forced perspective and miniatures to give them superhuman scale.”**



**Inset:** Shooting Super 8 from a ditch, Wang frames his milk-carton-top miniature of the life-size Meta Spartan reaching for Chen Chow Mein's miniature stand-in. Using quick cuts enabled Wang to convincingly create the illusion of the gargantuan stone war gods.



Now that the shoot is long over, the cast and crew can congratulate themselves. But co-writer and co-star Johnny Saiko Espiritu says that when the film was in production, it was not easy going for anyone involved. “It was a long, hard shoot. As you watch the film you can actually see me get darker from all the days out in the sun. Like any film shoot, there were days when it was

**Wyatt Weed (who also did visual effects) as Raspmutant, the Mad Monk.**



hell.”

Espiritu portrays the crudely clownish Reepo. He explained that the project began life years earlier as a joke. “We shot a short film, which I guess is kind of the prequel now to RASCALS. It was a totally silly, plotless farce, but we liked the characters and Steve loved the idea of making his own film, so eventually we got more serious about it.”

But, as viewers might suspect from the crazed, slapstick humor of the projects, things never got too serious. Espiritu explained that large portions of the storyline and many of the gags were made up as the film progressed, with he and Wang pitching ideas back and forth. “We wanted a stronger punch at the end,” said Espiritu, “but we ran out of film and time. We basically said to watch for the continuing adventures of the Rascals, with the sincere belief that we’d get around to a sequel some day.”

One of the most phenomenal set pieces in the film is a climactic seaside battle be-

tween two giant stone wargods. To pull that feat off, Wang and effects man Eddie Yang designed two perfectly sculpted creature suits to be worn by actors. Wang filmed their battle using miniatures to stand in for the overpowered Rascals, and utilized forced perspective to give the gods an appearance of superhuman

getting parking tickets. Occasionally people would just fall asleep where they stood.”

Despite the grueling schedule, there were some moments of off-camera hilarity. “At one point we were setting up for a shot where we needed to throw a dummy over a cliff. Matt Rose (the Imperial Torture Master) was dragging this dummy by its heels and suddenly along comes this jogger. He took one look at Matt and bolted in the other direction.

Five minutes later there was a helicopter from the County Sheriff’s department landing next to us. This officer climbs out and takes a Dudley Do-right stance and asked us, point blank if we’ve killed anyone. We’re talking to this guy, dressed as ninjas with swords and nunchucks made of bone. We told him what we were doing and showed him the dummy. He shook his head and left us alone.”

The shooting schedule had a hectic pace, but remarkably, no one got seriously hurt during any of the fairly spectacular fight sequences. “People

*continued on page 61*

scale. Espiritu says that the beach shoot was one of the toughest periods of the production. “It was supposed to take about four days, we ended up being there four weeks. We were getting used to explaining our shots to the lifeguards, and eating meals with sand in them. Everybody was

**Below:** Raspmutant’s successor, Meesha the Spider Witch. This forced-perspective shot was achieved with the help of a table-top miniature set.



# TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III

## Acrobatic actors come out of their shells.

By Dale Kutzera

It looks so easy. No wires. Just natural, intuitive expressions. The animatronic Turtle heads in *TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES PART III* are so sophisticated, the individual personalities of the puppeteers can be seen in the Turtles they help create. That's no small feat considering it takes five to six people to bring each Turtle to life. The bulk of the acting and personality, however, comes from three: the actor in the suit, the puppeteer controlling the face and the voice which is added in post-production.

The reality of being a Ninja

David Fraser in full body mold for his Michaelangelo suit.



Turtle is one of sweat, exhaustion and claustrophobia. The suit, computer backpack and animatronic head weigh over 65 pounds. And that's before the form-fitted foam rubber is soaked with perspiration. "It's definitely not something that you want to wear everyday as a business suit," said actor David Fraser, who plays Michaelangelo. "Not that it doesn't fit properly. It's form fitted to our bodies, but your skin doesn't get a chance to breathe so you're constantly sweating and rubbing inside it. No wonder the actors want out as soon as the director yells, 'Cut!'"

Inside the Turtle head, 16 servos and motors buzz and whine within an inch of the wearer's face. If that isn't distracting enough, the actors' only connection to the outside world is what they hear over their radio headset and see through two small slits between the Turtle eyes. "It's phenomenal how good these guys are when you think they are almost blind and have to hit very detailed marks," said director Stuart Gillard. "Sometimes to direct them, I would end up shouting in their mouth at the top of my lungs, 'Turn left! Take two steps, then turn to Donatello and yell a line.' I have nothing but respect for those guys. They are the hardest working actors I've ever worked with."

For Fraser, playing Michaelangelo meant a crash course in mime and mask work. "The



TMNT's grand-scale battle sequences, here in villainous Lord Norinaga's courtyard, required extensive rehearsals.

puppeteers all understood it, because they work at it all the time, but it was new to the rest of us. We had to learn about change of focus and how to be very specific with your choices. You can muddy a movement by trying to do too much," said Fraser.

"The second week we started to work with the heads and the costumes. During that time each of us built a rapport with our individual puppeteers. They're great because they follow our movements so well. It just boggles me. I'll reach for something and the mouth will say, 'Hmmm, what's this?' as I'm reaching for it." According to Gillard, "It was almost like a marriage. They would rehearse and hang out together. Some were able to communicate with very few words. They just had a good sense of each other."

As the actors became acquainted with their suits, the

puppeteers practiced with elaborate control units used to create each Turtle's facial expressions. Head puppeteer Gordon Robertson coached the other operators to keep things simple. "I try to eliminate stuff, because you can add too much. The technology can be a trap in that you want to do so much with it that you've got this face that is busy all the time. I'm more of a believer in less is more. Throw in a blink here and there and people will believe that you do it all the time."

Gillard took a different approach to the marriage of post-dubbed dialogue and on camera performers for #3. "I came up with the idea of recording all the dialogue in advance. That way I know how the scenes played and we were able to use that as a guide track for the actors," he said.

After rehearsing the key dialogue scenes with the actors

Flanking Paige Turco as April O'Neil, (l-r) Matt Hill as Raphael, Jim Raposa as Donatello, Mark Caso as Leonardo, and David Fraser as Michaelangelo.



and puppeteers, Gillard gave them a cassette of the pre-recorded dialogue from the voice talents. These guide tracks gave them some indication of the tone and inflection Gillard was looking for. "It was a little bit scary for us to listen to it," said Robertson, who played Michaelangelo. "There is this old actors' thing of not wanting somebody else to influence what we're going to do. Some of his stuff I used, other times the scene demanded that I just go and not worry so much about what (the voice) did."

Rehearsing and getting acquainted with the technology and each other proved invaluable for the actors and puppeteers. Each pair developed their own vocabulary to communicate specific movements as well as a shared sense of when to stick to the script and when to improvise. "We have a great rapport," said Fraser of Robertson. "We both laugh at each other's jokes which is good, because if we don't think what we're doing is funny, then nobody else will. Sometimes the creative juices are just flowing and magic happens. You both think of the same thought at the same time and just do it."

"It's a gas," confirmed Robertson. "I try and upstage every time possible. 'David, fall down in this scene. David, do the hoola hoop in this scene. Let's milk this one for all it's worth.' He can talk to me and I can talk to him and the director can talk to all of us. Communication is one of the most important things."

Oddly enough, the communication is often most difficult with the human actors. "They think if the eyes are looking at you, then you're actually looking at them," said Fraser, "but it's not always the case. Or they might give you a small look that might work well in film but we're dead in the face, because we can't see it. We only have a teeny little space underneath each eye to catch it. And the puppeteer can't see it because it's slightly away from the camera. So unless they tell us at this moment I'm going to do this, we can't react to it. We

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# NINJA TURTLES III

## TURTLE TRAINER

*Joe Johnson: Real Life Sensei*

*By Dale Kutzera*

Amidst all the funny lines, foam latex and animatronics, people often forget that the Ninja Turtles films have their roots in martial arts movies. TMNT martial arts choreographer Pat Johnson started working in films in 1973 on Bruce Lee's *ENTER THE DRAGON*. He later worked on Jackie Chan films, as well as a few Chuck Norris movies, and the *KARATE KID* series. Quick, tough and disciplined, he is just what you'd expect from the person who choreographed the top five grossing martial arts films.

On the set of *TMNT III* Johnson was everywhere—coaching, cajoling, and fine-tuning the moves of his martial artists. "I had just finished *KARATE KID III* when they called me for *TURTLES*," recalled Johnson. I really didn't know a whole lot about the Turtles, but my son, who was 14 at the time, told me the whole story. My goal was just to make it a good martial arts film."

It was Johnson's hard-hitting fight scenes, however, that motivated several organizations to protest the film. "We were certainly influenced by that in the second picture. We toned it down and went a little more cartoonish and that definitely hurt the older audience we had on the first picture," explained producer Tom Grey. Johnson recalled, "We tried to focus on the person doing the hitting, as opposed to the person being hit, or to have the bad guy swing, miss and hit his own teammate. That made the Turtles look less violent. The film was a big success, \$80 million...but that's \$60 million less than the first one, and \$60 million is a lot of money."

For the third film, Johnson



While not as potentially dangerous, this opening dance number, in the Turtles' subway tunnel home, was as difficult to coordinate and execute as the fights.

was given more of a free rein to choreograph the kind of fights he does best. Johnson's work on the film began with casting the finest martial artists he could find. HoSung Pak, who plays Rafael, is the number one-rated forms competitor in America. Larry Lam, who plays Leonardo, is in the top five and Steve Ho (Donatello) was the top-rated forms competitor three years ago. Shisir Inocalla, Michaelangelo, is also a top competitor.

Johnson not only searches for top talent to portray the Turtles, but their adversaries as well. "They are really the ones in danger. They have to know the Turtle is going to throw a kick and they have to react to it. You have to be in the exact spot so you don't get hit, because they're really lethal blows," said Johnson.

Johnson said, "Working with the Turtles is really unique in that I have to do my choreography in stages. First I put together a fight scene and rehearse it. Then I put the Turtle

hands and feet on these men and we do it again. Then again with the Turtle body, without the shell and head. After that we put on the shell, do it again. Then the head and we go through the whole thing again. There's no choice. Vision, breathing, movement and balance are affected by each part of the costume."

In addition to choreography around the restrictions of the Turtle suits, Johnson faced the challenge of working with four very distinct fighting styles and weaponry. "Michaelangelo uses arnis, which is a Filipino form of martial arts. Rafael is a wuy shuy stylist, while Leonardo is a tae-kwan-do practitioner. Then there is Steven No, as Donatello, who does tae-kwan-do too, but is also a master with the bow. It's amazing how much of Donatello's personality is in Steven. They are just the same. An energy level that is always up to the ceiling. Sometimes I would actually pay admission to just sit back and watch Steven work." □

# MCEG

## MANIAC COP 3

*Third time not the charm says series co-creator.*

*By Dennis Fischer*

At the moment the L.A. police officers lifted their batons to beat Rodney King senseless they had no way to know what they were going to set off. Their acquittal led to the biggest conflagration in the Los Angeles ghetto since the Watts riots. It has also inspired the owners of the MANIAC COP film franchise to create their own twisted version of the consequences of broadcasting a videotape of police brutality.

That vision has created its own, far more minor, conflagration between franchise holders, Overseas Film Group and Neo Motion Pictures, and series creators, writer Larry Cohen and director William Lustig. Cohen is unhappy with the film and rewrites performed on it, saying, "The picture has completely deviated from my script. Everyone from the producer to the star was writing new scenes. I'm not proud of this picture. These people behaved very badly." He believes those involved were on an ego trip and have destroyed the series. However, to collect his residuals, he plans on retaining his contracted for credits on the film.

The original MANIAC COP grew out of Cohen's interest in MANIAC. Lustig, director of all three MANIAC COP films, said, "I did MANIAC in 1980, at a time when slasher films were very popular. The emphasis then was on murder and mayhem, and so there wasn't much character devel-

**"I've had no association with the project since May. I've done no editing, there was never a director's cut. They've turned it into a Canadian tax shelter movie."**



Cordell's (Robert Z'Dar) plans to marry slain officer Kate Sullivan, in a Santeria-styled voodoo ceremony, suddenly go up in smoke.

opment. It was very popular, and there was talk of doing a sequel, but there was never enough story to warrant it. In 1987 Cohen and I were talking about doing a picture together and he mentioned MANIAC, and asked why I never did a sequel. I explained my feelings to him, and he said 'Let's think of something. What could we do that is like a sequel, but is not quite.'" MANIAC COP, a

film originally envisioned as a sort of FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE FRENCH CONNECTION, with a murdered cop returning from the dead to wreak havoc with the citizenry, was the result. "We also came up with the copyline 'You have the right to remain silent...forever.' It was those two elements that we built the whole series out of."

The film played theatrically

and wound up being a big hit overseas and on video tape, spawning a sequel which resurrected the titular character, Matt Cordell, and pitted him against a cop named McKinney, played by Robert Davi. "Although I, and many other people, believe it's a better picture than the first one it did not play theatrically. Medusa, the company that financed it, was tied to MCEG and when MCEG went belly up it had a domino effect on Medusa. My film was set to be distributed and they decided to opt for quick cash and go straight to video," said Lustig.

MANIAC COP 2 was a bigger hit overseas than it was domestically. Lustig attributes this to U.S. audiences having a different expectation when they go to the movies. "They are less habitual moviegoers and what happens is that they want to see a big studio film. Overseas there is a lot more movie-going because television hasn't taken over the home like it has in this country. There is also a tendency in Europe to live your life outside your home, so there's many more habitual moviegoers, and a need for diversity of product. Films like MANIAC COP will play theatrically overseas because there is still a desire to see genre pictures up on a screen. They really have a respect for genre films that I don't see that much of in this country."

During production Lustig was fairly positive about the rewrites that would later incense Cohen. "The script was

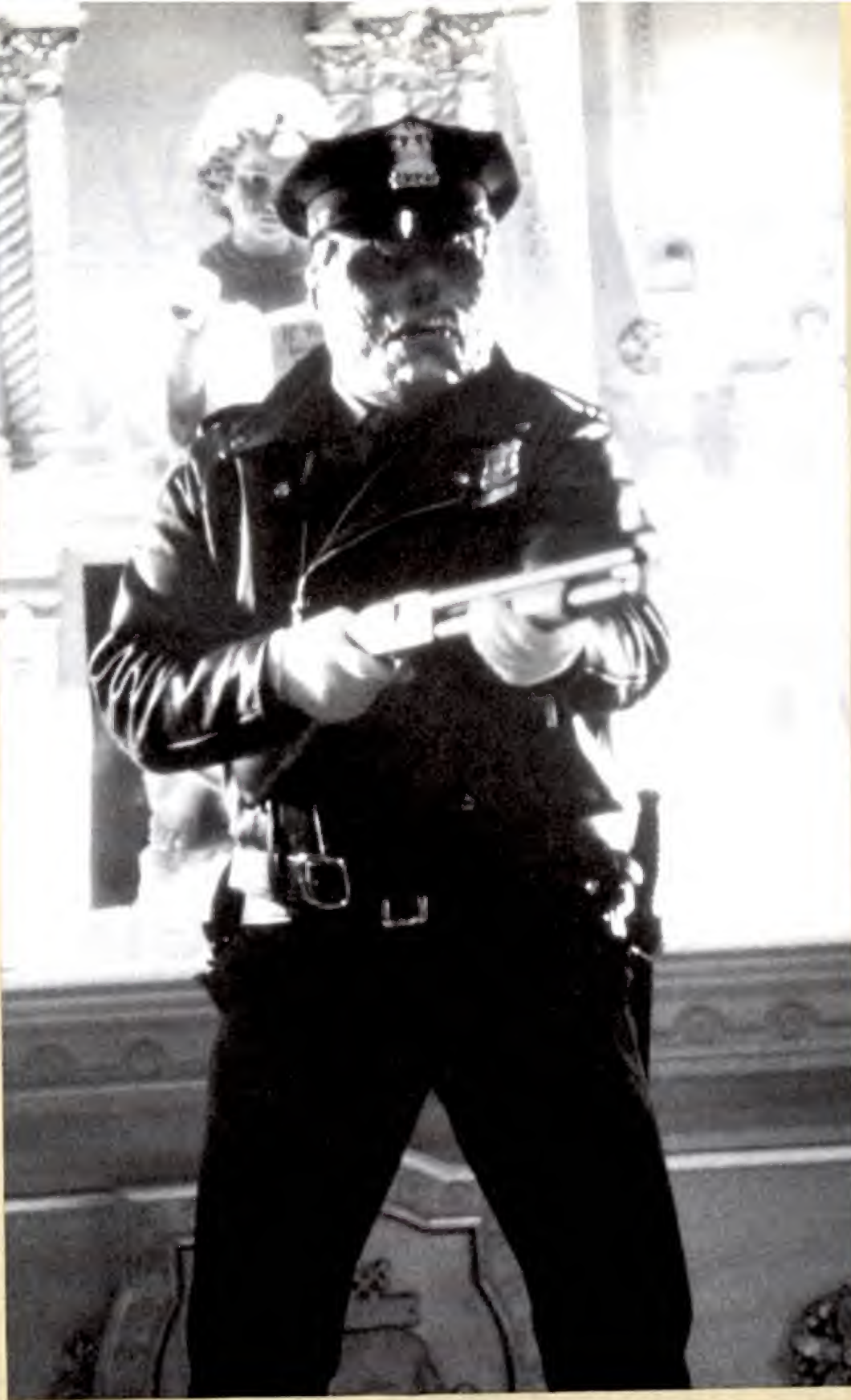
pretty much non-existent before we started to shoot. Revisions have been pretty much on a daily basis. It makes it more difficult as a director because you don't have the whole picture in your mind." Lustig also noted that Cohen himself was tied up with other projects and unavailable for rewrites.

The film's storyline was partially inspired by the Rodney King incident and the existence of a group of video mercenaries called The Bad News Bears, who prowl the LA streets looking for news to peddle to the networks. Producer Joel Soisson comments "They are obviously looking for the lurid, the violent, and the shocking, and our story presupposes that these type guys go one step too far and actually frame a police officer to make a better story, and to make some money."

In MANIAC COP 3, or MC3, as it has been titled for upcoming video release, a drug-crazed thief holds up a pharmacy. A young, gung-ho policewoman, Kate Sullivan, confronts him and the pharmacy turns into a shooting gallery. The noise attracts the attention of the Newz Hounds, a vigilante video crew, who film the horrific shootout but twist the footage to look like Sullivan has shot an innocent bystander. The gun battle leaves Sullivan in a coma, unable to defend herself against the public furor the tape arouses.

McKinney, sets out to prove her innocence while Cordell, revived in a Santeria-style voodoo rite, sets out to graphically eliminate anyone who threatens her well being. The dead Cordell falls for the near death Sullivan as McKinney is falling for her doctor. Soisson believes that these parallels have given the story a romantic edge, a PHANTOM OF THE OPERA-esque quality. Cordell's redemption at the end of MANIAC COP 2 meant to Soisson that they had "to create a kinder, gentler Maniac Cop, and maybe redefine what his legacy is, and what he is about, and what he wants."

In addition to redefining the character Soisson felt "we needed to redefine him visibly.



In his third resurrection as the MANIAC COP, Z'Dar, his ineffective slip-on mask obscured as usual confronts returning adversary Lt. McKinney.

The last thing we saw was him getting burned up in a bus at the end of number 2, so he's very disfigured, but we came up with more of an E.C. Comics type look: bubbling flesh, skeletal features, bullet wounds, kind of half-menacing, and half sad."

The makeup for BADGE OF SILENCE is being handled by Howard Berger, of KNB, and his crew. Unlike the first MANIAC COP, which used prosthetics, the subsequent films in the series have relied on less time-consuming masks. By specially sculpting the mask to fit the face of actor Robert Z'Dar (who has portrayed Cordell in all three films) the application time has been halved.

Z'Dar's character has been largely silent, but Lustig found that "between the first and second picture Robert had devel-

oped a really good body language for the character. The way Karloff did in FRANKENSTEIN." Z'Dar feels that his character has grown in the films. "Before, he used to kill basically good people because he was so twisted and bitter about the way things have happened to him. Now, he's a man on a mission to help another officer who has been framed. This brings on a closeness to her, and a sense of wanting and love that he hasn't had in the first two."

Soisson agrees with Z'Dar's interpretation. "We redefined the character, but doing that is risky. You automatically expose yourself to comparison with the predecessor, and whether the new concept is as clever, or as amusing as the old one. We had to change it enough to enrich it, but not so much that it loses connection

with the audience that was the reason you're making a sequel in the first place."

While both Lustig and Soisson have high praise for the films creative crew, particularly stunt coordinator Spiro Razatos (whose 2nd unit direction on the car chase between McKinney and a flaming Cordell is the film's action high-point), relations between the two soured as the production progressed. During production Lustig expressed, "I'm more a hired director. I also produced the others and I really stood with them from their infancy. I'm still involved with them. On this film, I kind of come in, I direct it, and I leave. I find it a bit frustrating."

That frustration would soon peak and Lustig would leave before production was completed and would wish to have his name taken off the project. According to Lustig he shot about 45-50 minutes, Razatos 2nd unit work accounted for another 5-6 minutes. Production sources say 15 minutes of additional footage were shot to bring the film to a 90-minute running time. These scenes developed Davi's love relationship with Sullivan's doctor and added some Freddie-like scenes of jokey horror to an otherwise somber film. Said Lustig, "I've had no association with the project since May. I've done no editing on the project, nor was there ever a director's cut. They've turned it into a Canadian tax shelter movie." □

William Lustig, director of COP I, II and most of III, lines up a shot or perhaps his escape route.



# REVIEWS

## Pointless retread fails as remake or as sequel



In a shot reminiscent of Sutherland's last scene of the '78 remake, Meg Tilly warns fellow "pod-ophiles" of humans.

### BODY SNATCHERS

A Warner Bros. release of a Dorset Productions film. In Dolby and color. Director, Abel Ferrara. Producer, Robert H. Solo. Director of Photography, Bojan Bozelli. Co-producer, Michael Jaffe. Associate producer, Kimberly Brent. Editor, Anthony Redman. Production designer, Peter Jamison. Costume designer, Margaret Mohr. Music, Joe Della. Screenplay by Stuart Gordon, Dennis Paoli & Nicholas St. John.

Marti Malone ..... Gabrielle Anwar  
 Carol Malone ..... Meg Tilley  
 Steve Malone ..... Terry Kinney  
 Andy ..... Reilly Murphy  
 Tim ..... Billy Wirth  
 Jenn Platt ..... Christine Elise  
 Mason Collins ..... Forest Whitaker  
 Geni Platt ..... R. Lee Ermy

By Mark A. Altman

You have to admire the chutzpah of BODY SNATCHERS producer Robert Solo to still believe that there's dramatic, and box-office, gold to be struck from what he considers the INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS franchise. Sadly, the film is only an odd hybrid of the manic, off-kilter sensibilities of its off-the-wall director, Abel Ferrara (whose most

recent effort BAD LIEUTENANT features a pivotal scene of a nun being raped with a crucifix) and the, by now, well established BODY SNATCHERS lore. You have to wonder who thought that Ferrara was the right choice to follow in the footsteps of Don Spiegel and Phillip Kaufman, whose cerebral progenitors bear little resemblance to Ferrara's crass, and often, tasteless degenerations into misogyny and high camp on celluloid.

Strangely, Ferrara's version is a fairly tame film which, ironically, could have benefitted from a little less mundane plotting and thriller conventions, and more of his bizarre filmic sensibilities. Instead, Ferrara's hyperkinetic energy only seems to contribute to the schizophrenic nature of the newest film.

Neither a straight remake of the first two, nor a sequel, BODY SNATCHERS can't decide if it wants to be fatalistic or fascist,

horrific or humorous. What's missing is the defining metaphor of Don Siegel's original 1956 version, a thinly veiled attack on the conformity of '50s America in the wake of the McCarthy/HUAC hearings, and the equally brilliant 1978 remake which attacks the New Age fads of the so-called "me" generation, in which people are faced with an increased alienation from society and estrangement from interpersonal relationships. BODY SNATCHERS '93 makes the pretense of dealing with "family values", but the attempt already seems dated. Ferrara seems far more interested in the violent nuances of the metamorphosis from human to pod person, rather than the disintegration of the family, the film's supposed theme.

Originally written by RE-ANIMATOR collaborators Stuart Gordon and Dennis Paoli, that script was heavily rewritten by frequent Ferrara writing partner

## Simple approach makes surprise family video hit

### LEGEND OF WOLF MOUNTAIN

Hemdale Home Video release of a Majestic Entertainment/Wolf Mountain production. 88 mins. Director, Craig Clyde. Executive producers, Eric Parkinson & Charles Lund. Producer, Bryce Fillmore. Music, John McCallum. Screenplay by Craig Clyde & James Hennessy.

Ranger Haynes ..... Bo Hopkins  
 Jensen ..... Mickey Rooney  
 Jocko Painter ..... Robert Z'Dar  
 Kerrie Haynes ..... Nicole Lund  
 John Page ..... Jonathan Best  
 Casey Hames ..... Matthew Lewis  
 Kathy Haynes ..... Vivian Schilling  
 Simco ..... Don Shanks

by John Thonen

Low-budget limitations are overcome here by relying on a simple story, with politically correct environmental themes and the natural appeal of its child actors, and scenic locales, WOLF MOUNTAIN manages to charm and entertain almost effortlessly.

The story involves three children who are inadvertently kidnapped when the car they are in is stolen by two escaping bank robbers. The efforts of their parents, and townfolk, to rescue them provide a core for adult identification

with the story (always important for this type of film) but the real story involves the children's escape from the crooks and their journey down the title precipice, with the villains in hot pursuit.

The story teeters on the brink of HOME ALONE territory at times. Especially when the kids face off against the robbers, one of whom is a total bufoon, a la Daniel Stern's character in the

mega hit, but the film manages to avoid going overboard in this area thanks to the genuinely menacing performance of Z'Dar (out from under the MANIAC COP makeup for once) as the other robber, and the introduction of a fantasy element in the persona of an ancient Indian warrior who appears to all, but the young girl, in the guise of a wolf.

The mystical Indian presence

takes human form at key moments to guide the children and protect them from both the natural dangers of the mountain, and the threat of the robbers. While the role is a little cliched, Native American Don Shanks, of the Cherokee tribe, brings dignity and a powerful presence to the role. Like Z'Dar Shanks previous imagi-movie role found him beneath a mask as Michael Meyers in HALLOWEEN 5.

Surprisingly, the film's top name performers are consistently outshined by the lesser-knowns like Shanks, Z'Dar and Lund. Rooney is present only for an extended cameo, and Hopkins does his standard slow-witted authority figure, a role he could easily play in his sleep, and has a few times.

WOLF MOUNTAIN has been a surprise video hit for Hemdale, selling over 50,000 copies, and a sequel is already in the works. One can only hope that they don't lose track of the simple virtues that made this film work. □

Don Shanks, as the spirit of Wolf Mountain, guides Kerrie Haynes (Nicole Lund) and friends to safety.



Nigel St. John. Reportedly at the cost of satirical bite and gore. It's regrettable since Gordon would have been the perfect choice to direct the film, imprinting his own unique hybrid of wry Grand Guignol, coupled with his intellectual and socio-political cognizance of the material.

The film's biggest mis-step probably lies in its setting. Placing the film on an army base may have offered unlimited opportunities for gunfire and explosions, but the inherent premise of the *BODY SNATCHERS* mythos is blunted by it. The military's emphasis on totally giving up one's individuality, while marching in step to the orders of a single leader, already seems "pod philosophy." Unlike the first two films, the characters here are already so one-dimensional that it's difficult to gauge their transition, or feel any empathy for the de-humanized base dwellers.

The film's classic forerunners transcended standard "B" movie contrivances, but Ferrara seems content to openly embrace them. We are offered only standard shoot-em-ups as the young survivors attempt to escape the base. Ferrara has proven adept at conveying the grime and slime of contemporary urban America, but

seems ill at ease in the "boonies" of Alabama, far from the mean streets of New York.

Forrest Whittaker contributes a walk-on as the base's chief medical officer and gives a campy, over the top performance that is completely inappropriate to the film. In a scene meant to echo Donald Sutherland's chilling attempt to reach to outside authorities, in the '78 remake, only to cry out at the operator, "How did you know my name, I didn't tell you my name," Ferrara and Whittaker completely botch the replay of this scene and only succeed in illustrating how badly the script's failings are exacerbated by the casting. Whittaker has been brilliant in several films (*BIRD* and *THE CRYING GAME*) and almost always at least competent, but here he gives an unbearably inept performance that, even in its brevity, is hard to shake off. Meg Tilly, a wooden actress best known for a willingness to shed her clothes is virtually indistinguishable from human to pod. Not surprisingly, Tilly displays full-frontal nudity.

That is not to say that the film is totally without merit. Ferrara directs competently, with some interesting visual flourishes. Most effective is the creepiness he



A military hospital becomes a pod person breeding ground in the remake.

brings to some of the scenes. In one brilliant sequence, a young boy attends a day care where the already podded students all turn in identical finger drawings, prompting the still human child to flee in terror. The scene better captures the terror of conformity, subjugating individuality both in society and in art (possibly alluding to the religious right's attempts to de-fang the National Endowment of the Arts) better than any other in the movie. Had the psychological terror inherent in this scene been more a part of the

movie, rather than by-the-book thriller components, such as the female lead asleep in a tub while pod tentacles attempt to wind their way into her, Ferrara might have placed his film in a league with its two progenitors.

The film's *RAMBO*-like finale seems at odds with its downbeat ending. Ferrara has tried to appeal to the jingoistic action crowd, and the more thoughtful *INVASION*-podphiles in the audience, but you can't have it both ways, as the ending, like the movie, would have it. □

## Interactive video board game blends chills and fun

### NIGHTMARE: THE GAME by Dan Scapperotti

A half dozen players sit, seance-like, before an ominously glowing television screen, situated in a dimly lit room. Between them lies a dark, somehow brooding, game board. Although the volume on the TV is set only slightly below "earbleed" the faint tinkle of tiny bells is the only sound to be heard. Suddenly, the silence is shattered by a crash of thunder and the startled players find themselves face to face with "The Gatekeeper." This...is *NIGHTMARE*, and it's a far cry from *MONOPOLY*.

The fast paced, interactive, video board game is the brain child of Australian film producers Brett Clements and Phillip Tanner and is being produced and marketed by one of that country's largest entertainment companies, Village Roadshow. After becoming the biggest selling new game ever to hit down under, the company implemented an aggressive, worldwide marketing campaign. Advertising ranges from the posters that plaster the London underground (where it's known as *ATOMSFEAR*) to the commercials that inundated U.S. TV this past holiday season.

Clements and Tanner took two years to

create the game, but have found that even their fellow countrymen assume it to be American in origin. "I think it's the production values," said Clements. "Truth is, we spent an awful lot of our own money making it look this slick."

The video tape that comes with the game limits play to an hour, wherein the fortunes of the participants are controlled by the demonic presence of the Gatekeeper. Each player chooses a character from a cast that includes a vampire, werewolf, mummy, zombie and other classic horror figures. The goal is to collect a set of keys while being careful not to plunge into a black hole or incur the wrath of the Gatekeeper, who refers to the players only as "maggots."

Clements admits that the hardest part of creating the game was making it scare people. "It's the sound that gets you—the horror sound. You're cool, relaxed...then bang, six people get their pants scared off them." The game's shock factor is remarkably successful. After an hour of play you're ready for a valium.

The game ends with a promise that horror fans are already well acquainted with. Watch for *NIGHTMARE II: BARON SAME-DI*, the sequel already in the works. □



The Gate Keeper, *NIGHTMARE: THE GAME*'s host who calls the game players maggots.

*Style and cast help sleek Euro-tech thriller to deliver*

**KNIGHT MOVES**

A Republic Home Video Release of an Interstar Film, an El Koury/Default Geissler Production. Director, Karl Schenkel. Producer, Zhad El Koury. Screenplay by Brad Mirman.

Peter Sanderson.....Christopher Lambert  
Kathy Sheppard.....Diane Lane  
Frank Sedman.....Tom Skerritt  
Andy Wagner.....Daniel Baldwin

by Norman Laughlin

KNIGHT MOVES is a sleek, stylish and sexy thriller with enough plot twists to keep a psych-chic guessing. With its stylized sets, chiaroscuro lighting, oblique camera angles and graphic sex, it is very much a '90s update of the European Giallo tradition of erotic thrillers.

Lambert, one of the few actors who can create an attitude just by moving his forehead, here essays the role of an aloof, even arrogant, chess grandmaster. His carefully constructed icy demeanor is gradually chipped away when he is forced into a convoluted game of mental chess with a killer. The psycho has a penchant for killing nameless young women, with drop-dead bods and blank expressions, then leaving cryptic messages

spelled out in their blood.

Not surprisingly, Lambert becomes the number one suspect in the murders. Diane Lane, Lambert's real-life wife, portrays his only ally, a child psychiatrist brought in to help the police profile the killer. Eventually, even she has her doubts about Lambert's innocence and their relationship alternates from lust to suspicion.

Lambert is at best a limited performer who has largely specialized in playing protohumans. Here, he offers essentially his standard alienated Neanderthal characterization, though his eventual frustration, anger and panic at his situation is pretty effective. Lane remains one of the great beauties of the screen, her swollen red lips the stuff of adolescent sticky fingers. Her convincing portrayal of a woman somehow attracted to Lambert's chessmaster helps warm the viewer to his otherwise none-too-likeable character.

As the local police chief, Tom Skerritt gives his usual effortlessly first-rate work. This man is seemingly incapable of a bad performance. Daniel Baldwin's hot-shot de-

tective role seems to exist only to offer a character who is more obnoxious than Lambert's. Baldwin snorts and stomps his way through the film. He and Lambert are constantly in each other's face in some sort of war of the petulants.

Director Schenkel displays a sophisticated sense of pacing in which he deliberately offsets the audience's expectations as the plot twists tighter. Employing a highly mobile camera style, at times reminiscent of Dario Argento, he drives the action ever faster until the last 20 minutes kick into hyper-drive. It's high noon in the boiler room as Lambert confronts the killer in an inevitable conclusion.

The silent flashbacks to the killer's youth also seem Argento-inspired, but the Giallo tradition has always been highly derivative of its progenitors and Schenkel is no exception. The killer's identity comes from so far out in left field that even the most dedicated of mystery fans will probably be surprised, if a little irritated, by the revelation. Still, the buildup and the confrontation after the unveiling are satisfactory enough to offset this flaw.



Psychiatrist Lane, drawn to and fearful of suspected serial killer Lambert in KNIGHT MOVES.

If there is any grievous fault to KNIGHT MOVES it is perhaps too polished. It has a kind of techno-sheen to it that seems somewhat sterile. Still, having said that, anyone looking for a genuine thriller that moves like a virgin through a steambath, and doesn't insult your intelligence, should investigate KNIGHT MOVES. □

*Cowboys and aliens TV show fails as sci-fi or adventure*

**SPACE RANGERS**

A CBS presentation by Trilogy Entertainment Group in association with RHI Entertainment. Executive producers, Richard H. Lewis, Pen Densham, John Watson, Scott Brazil. Created by Densham.

Boon.....Jeff Kaake  
JoJo.....Marjorie Monaghan  
Doc.....Jack McGee  
Zylyn.....Cary Hirokyu Tagawa  
Chennault.....Linda Hunt  
Mimmer.....Clint Howard  
Colonel.....Gottfried John

by Chris Martin

Hardcore science fiction fans who watch for SPACE RANGERS on Sunday morning will be in for a real treat: it won't be on. Viewers who stuck with the show for its recent prime time run will understand why its ratings rapidly eroded, from week to week, and also be reminded of why the STAR TREK phenomenon is such a tough thing to replicate.

The title characters fly as law officers on the fringe of civilized space, in a vintage cyberpunk motif. Think of it as "saddle up and download." The team is made up of steely female pilot JoJo, raised on a

planet that was abandoned by the male population (even in the distant future, men still don't know how to commit) the green (not literally) rookie Kincaid, the mystical alien warrior Zylyn (with a penchant for devouring the remains of his enemies), the supposedly complex White Anglo-Saxon captain, alternately tough and tender (explaining

why Zylyn hasn't eaten him yet), and several other stock characters from Cliche Casting Central.

The Rangers are semi-directed by the Colonel, an effete bureaucrat, and supervised by Commander Chennault, who functions as a sort of paramilitary Mary Worth.

The producers of this series deserve credit for staying out of STAR TREK's space, but why did they have to bring us the distant cousin of the ALIENS as the chief menace. Known as Banshees, these creatures display all the habits of their cinematic relations except for proper monster etiquette: they spit their slime instead of drooling it.

Watching STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION take its first fledgling steps, who could have envisioned a Klingon warrior as a nurturing single parent...or the ship's doctor having a delicate affair with a being whose sexual identity is transient? Unusual developments such as these have kept the program interesting and have helped sustain it through six seasons.

But television networks still don't

like to hear the SF word. This is regrettable since a greater appreciation for the nuances of science fiction might have opened up the Ranger's storyline. For instance:

Will Chennault ever tell Boon it's all right for a human to use more than two emotions?

Will the rookie Kincaid discover that, in a previous life, he was Gilligan?

If, as one of the producers suggests, the Banshees have intelligence and a purpose, would they ever have gotten a chance to write and direct some episodes.?

While the STAR TREK series strives to go boldly where one has gone before, the combination here seems to leave the SPACE RANGERS merely orbiting in a nebula of deja vu.

Equating SPACE RANGERS with past western series may not be such a bad idea. Re-examining the episodes could stir up happy memories of LAREDO, THE TEXAS RANGERS, WYATT EARP and (unintentionally) F-TROOP. □

CBS's mercifully short-lived SPACE RANGERS series.





## *Prolific, if non-existent, director finally makes good film*

### SOLAR CRISIS

A Vidmark Home Video Release of a Trimark Pictures film, of a Gakken NHK Enterprises Production. Producers, Richard Edlund, James Nelson, Morris Morishima. Visual Effects Supervisor Neil Krepela. Music, Maurice Jarre. Director, Alan Smithee. Screenplay by Takeshi Kawata, based on the novel by Takeshi Kawata.

Steve Kelso ..... Tim Matheson  
Admiral "Skeet" Kelso ..... Charlton Heston  
Arnold Teague ..... Peter Boyle  
Alex Noffe ..... Annabel Schofield  
Travis ..... Jack Palance  
Mike Kelso ..... Corin "Corky" Nemec  
Freddy the Bomb ..... Paul Williams

by John Thonen

SOLAR CRISIS is a generally engrossing film that marks the zenith of director Alan Smithee's long, and notably undistinguished, career. All of this is faint praise since Smithee is the official nom de auteur assumed by directors who wish to remove their name from a finished film. This time it's special effects maestro Richard (GHOST-BUSTERS, ALIEN 3) Edlund, and it's hard to imagine why he went to such lengths to mask his directorial debut.

Opening with the Earth baking

beneath a series of massive eruptions on the sun, scientists detect a massive flare that could destroy the Earth. Matheson and a stalwart team are sent to drop an anti-matter bomb onto the sun's surface to divert the flare.

Matheson gives his customary low-key, but effective, performance, which allows Heston and Palance to chew the scenery without competition. Of the name performers Peter Boyle fares best as the head of a multi-national conglomerate who doesn't believe the solar flare will happen and who sees the worldwide disaster around him as a chance to make more money. The oddest cast character would have to be Paul Williams as Freddy the Bomb, an intelligent, talking, insecure anti-matter device. While played pretty straight, it's hard not to experience flashbacks of O'Bannon and Carpenter's DARK STAR ('74), which featured a similarly garrulous incendiary played from the more natural comedic viewpoint.

Outside of a few brief scenes



Project Officer Alex Noffe (Annabel Schofield) demonstrates to the Helios crew the expected results of the solar flare. Effects courtesy of Boss Films.

between Matheson and Heston (who play father and son) none of the film's name performers share any time with the other. Structurally this is a bit odd, giving the feeling that each is in his own mini-movie. Still each of these is well-told and there is none of that annoying insert feel that sometimes happens when actors roles are tailored to fit their availability, rather than the needs of the story.

There do seem to be some sizable jumps in plot development that imply post-production tampering and could explain Edlund's efforts

at anonymity. In addition, some of the dialogue is hopelessly melodramatic, if delivered admirably straight-faced.

SOLAR CRISIS has had theatrical play in much of the world, but debuted in the U.S. on home video. While neither a classic, nor an embarrassment, this is a solid little (budget notwithstanding) science fiction film of the type we used to see a lot of in the fifties and sixties, with '90s-caliber effects. As such, it is as satisfying as most of them were. □

## *Mythic tale triumphs over its low-budget flaws*

### KNIGHTS

Moonstone Entertainment presents a King's Road production. Producer, Tom Karnowski. Director, Albert Pyun. Special Makeup Effects and mechanical creations by David Barton. Optical, Optical Fantasy II. Music, Tony Riparetti. Screenplay by Pyun.

Nea ..... Kathy Long  
Gabriel ..... Kris Kristofferson  
Job ..... Lance Henriksen  
Simon ..... Scott Paulin  
David ..... Gary Daniels

by Chuck Crisafulli

Has director Albert Pyun ever uttered the words "Take two"? It's hard to tell from the look of such frantically paced and slapdash efforts as LUNAR MADNESS or ALIEN FROM L.A. Sometimes, though, Pyun's weaknesses become his strengths. Taking an odd-ball cast, tattered storyline and minimal effects budget, Pyun has plunked it all down in the deserts of Utah and cobbled together a sci-fi movie that is a triumph of atmosphere over believability, KNIGHTS.

Pyun presents here a desolate futurescape of cyborgs-gone-bad, and the unlikely protagonists who do battle with them: Kick-boxing



Kathy Long as Nea, a survivor of Pyun's post-apocalyptic world of mauling cyborgs and mythic heroes.

champion Kathy Long, as Nea, a human in search of a long-lost brother, and erstwhile rocker Kris Kristofferson as Gabriel, a robot on a mission to bring peace back to the planet. Both are in direct competition with Job, the malevolent ruler of the 'borgs, portrayed by Lance Henriksen.

Relationships shift as quickly as the camera angles and motivations

are never particularly clear, but this neo-mythic tale does have its charms. Long makes a credible debut and shows off a winning screen presence, as well as countless 'borg-stomping dropkicks. It's about time the world of action pictures had a strong, intelligent woman at the center of the rough and tumble. Kristofferson, on the other hand, appears uncomfortable and mechanical, but since he plays a frequently dismembered robot it's not that far off the mark. Henriksen leaps into his role as if it were a psych-ward production of RICHARD III and delivers some much appreciated camp and dark humor to his scenes.

The special effects are perfunctory and obligatory: a few cyborg heads get smashed and throw off a few sparks, and Henriksen sports a mechanical arm the size of a Volkswagen. But effects aren't the film's hallmark anyway. If you remember much beyond Long's biceps it will be the almost non-stop fight sequences, and that action is usually well-staged and effective.

The presence of pro-martial arts masters like Long and Britain's Gary Daniels add to the believability, but Pyun even manages to make us buy into laid-back, 56-year-old Kristofferson as a robotic Bruce Lee. Whatever his faults as a dramatist, and I doubt we have room to cover them, few can film and edit as convincing an action sequence as Pyun.

Viewers of Pyun's other recent robot-romp, NEMESIS (pg. 44), will probably catch the several cameos from members of its cast, notably Tim Thomerson.

KNIGHTS does not have a sensible story, but events do unravel with the kind of weird, twisted logic of a bad dream, and that, at least, keeps the movie watchable

Pyun's worst mistake is in KNIGHTS non-ending. The final minutes leave all major plot points unresolved in favor of setting up a sequel that promises more exciting battles across time and space—not much of a pay-off to an audience that's just taken in an hour and a half of cyborgs in Utah. □

## FILM RATINGS

- Must See
- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Poor

### BABYLON 5

Directed by Richard Compton. Warner Bros TV. With: Michael O'Hare, Tamilyn Tomita, Jerry Doyle, Mira Furlan, Blaire Baron, Andreas Katsulas, Patricia Tallman, Johnny Sekka.

Let's face it, writer/co-producer J. Michael Stracynski has written more original material for the animated version of GHOSTBUSTERS. Never have so many science fiction clichés been used to so little effect—the telepath, the shape changer, the alien so unspeakable looking no one can look at it, the imperiled space station, the melding of outlandish alien races in one location, etc...

This is certainly the most badly cast of the three recent TV shows set on space stations. Particularly lacking in believability, charisma and general stage presence are leads Michale O'Hare as Commander Sinclair and Jerry Doyle as Security Chief Garibaldi.

The special effects people were obviously overextended and had to resort to a variety of limited puppets and makeups for minor aliens so basic, some look like raw, unpainted foam rubber.

Never is there any sense of menace or urgency; indeed the plot resolves itself with nearly 20 minutes left in the running time, in order to tie-up plot strings neatly for the proposed series. The ballyhooed computer-generated effects are variable; some are knockouts, such

**The still-fetching Veronica Carlson all tied up with her duties as hostess of FANGS.**



**A Gremlin-like creature that assists the Tropolkin, the title creature from STEPMONSTER, in her marital plans.**

as the Vorlon ship, but others are terrible, such as the overhead view from the Japanese garden, which is shown repeatedly.

This is another case of overselling a product. Nobody could live up to the hoopla of BABYLON 5, but the two-hour pilot didn't even come close.

○ **Judith Harris**

### FANGS

Written and directed by Bruce Hallenbeck. A European film Production, Pagan Video Release. Produced by Carl Dietz. Narrated by Veronica Carlson.

The Vampire, one of Europe's most enduring and primal myths, has spawned its own subgenre within the ranks of horror film. While the popularity of the caped bloodsucker has waxed and waned, he has never truly faded from view.

With Coppola's DRACULA having born a new surge of vampiric popularity, new and old fans should be entertained by this compilation tape. Using movie clips and trailers, director Hallenbeck and hostess Carlson (herself a former Hammer ingenue) trace the history of the vampire films from NOSFERATU (1922) to the heyday of Hammer.

FANGS is a treat for anyone fascinated by the undead. Sure the title is a little cutesy and the tape's scope is limited by relying on too few sources, largely Hammer trailers, and thus overlooking such worthy recent entries as a Kathryn Bigelow's NEAR DARK and Katt Shea's DANCE WITH A VAMPIRE, but it's hard to be too harsh on anything this enjoyable.

As a limited exploration into the history of the vampire film, and as a retrospective of Hammer films, FANGS is an entertaining and informative look at the cinematic world of the undead, the princes and princesses, of darkness, these carriers

of our darkest and most primal fears; sex and death.

●● **Norman Laughlin**

### STEBMONSTER

Directed by Jeremy Stanford. New Horizons Video. With: Alan Thicke, Robin Riker, George Gaynes, Ami Dolenz, John Astin, Molly Cheek, Corey Feldman.

STEBMONSTER is a juvenile remake of MY STEPMOTHER IS AN ALIEN (1988), whose original story is credited to Fred Olen Ray. Todd (Corben) is a comic book-loving youngster whose mom (Cheek) disappears under mysterious circumstances in the very location where Tropolkins are rumored to dwell. A couple months later, Dad (Thicke) decides to remarry guess who? Although Todd is portrayed as a monster-lover, he doesn't take kindly to having one in the family and despite all the expertise handed down by Grandpa (Gaynes), no one knows how to kill a Tropolkin. The answer lies in a rare \$500 comic book under lock and key in the local comic store. Little use is made of the good comic cast (particularly wasted is the always wonderful John Astin) and the single Tropolkin is a largely unthreatening scaly makeup. Its harpy protector is a puppet which looks just like a Gremlin. OK for kids, although they might get restive at the slow pace.

● **Judith Harris**

### OVERLOOKED & UNDERRATED

#### GRAND TOUR: DISASTER IN TIME

Directed by David N. Twohy. Republic Home Video release of Wallstreet Pictures Production. With: Jeff Daniels, Ariana Richards, Emilia Crow, Jim Haynie, Robert Colbert.

GRAND TOUR is one of those enchanting little movies that seems to get lost in the industry's scramble for blockbusters.

The film offers Jeff Daniels as the owner of a small-town bed and breakfast. Recovering from his wife's death in a freak accident, and trying to raise a precocious daughter, he finds himself playing unwitting host to a group of tourists from the future: jaded disaster groupies who travel through time to witness cataclysms of their past.

Genre fans will certainly get a smile from Robert Colbert's presence as the leader of the time-hopping visitors. The veteran actor first gained note as Doug Phillips, a time-traveling scientist in the '60s' series THE TIME TUNNEL. GRAND TOUR, however, is a big step away from Irwin Allen TV science fiction.

Daniels, who seems to be making a career of playing the affable everyman forced to confront forces beyond his control, be it spider hordes (ARACHNOPHOBIA), visitors from the future, or Melanie Griffith (SOMETHING WILD), gives an enjoyable performance as he finds himself confronting not only the nature of time but also himself, literally, as he meets his own doppelganger. Here, his greatest challenge is to figure out what, and when, the disaster to strike will be, and to defy the rules of the time travelers, and of the cosmos, to save as many of his fellow townspeople as possible.

Director and screenwriter David Twohy handles his cosmic themes with a gentle touch rather than a fist. Despite its science fiction plot, GRAND TOUR plays out as a love story: the love of a man for a woman; the love of a father for a daughter, and, in the climax of the film, the triumph of love over cosmic forces, things as unalterable as death and time. This is a charming little film, which manages to engage the mind, while tugging at the heart. It deserved far better than an igno-

minious sentence to cable and video obscurity.

●●●● **Norman Laughlin**

### SCARECROWS

Directed by William Wesley. Forum Home Video, Effigy Films Production. With: Ted Vernon, Victoria Christian, Richard Vidan, B.J. Turner, David Campbell.

SCARECROWS is one of the long list of low-budget horror films to be unceremoniously dumped onto the home video market. Like the others, it offers a list of credits that feature nary a familiar name. Unlike most of the others, SCARECROWS is damn good. It is very possibly one of the best horror films of the '80s.

Director William Wesley (who also co-wrote, co-produced and edited) has fashioned a unique tale here, and he has the talent to make it work. Working with a small cast, a handful of locations and a devilishly simple story that transpires in but a single night, Wesley never wastes a moment.

The film opens shortly after a para-military group has pulled off a daring payroll robbery at a military base. Escaping in a hijacked plane, they are double-crossed by one of their group and forced to land when he parachutes with the money. Unfortunately, the farmhouse they land near was once the home of a trio of Black Magic devotees who may be absent in form, but are very much present in spirit.

The film moves at a relentless pace. It is gory, gloomy and decidedly downbeat. It is not concerned with character development. It just wants to scare you, to shock you. And that it does. The one certainty is that after viewing this film the word scarecrow will no longer bring to mind memories of Ray Bolger and the yellow brick road.

●●●● **John Thonen**

**Space justice. A panel reviews charges against Captain Sinclair aboard the Babylon 5 station.**



## VIDEOPHILE by Craig Ledbetter

## GIALLO: The Color of Fear—Part One

While reading an article on Dario Argento, or Mario Bava, you may have come across the term "Giallo." The expression is commonly used to describe an entire genre of Italian thrillers that usually (but not always) feature a black-gloved killer, brandishing a straight-razor (or knife, or axe, or...) to a young (usually nude) Italian starlet's neck. If you look giallo up in an Italian-English dictionary you'll discover it's Italian for the color yellow. So, now that I've clouded the issue by unveiling the facts... What the hell does it have to do with graphic Italian splatter films?

Much as the expression film noir was derived from the black cover of the *Serie Noir*, hard-boiled detective novels of France, Giallo has its origins in the lurid yellow covers of Italian mystery novels of the '50s.

From 1962, when Mario Bava's *LA RAGAZZA CHE SAPEVA TROPPO* (THE EVIL EYE) created the genre, to son Lamberto Bava's *MOSAICO A CORPO* (BODY PUZZLE, 1992) 30 years later, well over 100 titles have been produced in this durable sub-genre. Sadly, most have received scant, or no release, in this country, and remain virtually unknown. What I'll attempt to do in this, and next issue's column, is to give the reader a working overview of this very rich domain.

What I won't be doing here is rehashing the work of Mario Bava or Dario Argento. This is no slight on their considerable contributions, but only recognition of their work having been covered elsewhere many times. The aim here is to expose readers to lesser known, but worthy, practitioners of "Giallo."

While Bava's *THE EVIL EYE* basically gave birth to the genre in 1962, it was his second Giallo, *SEI DONNE PER L'ASSASSINO* (BLOOD AND BLACK LACE, '64) that really set the stage for what would become the staples of the Italian thriller: The unseen, black-gloved killer, a setting that supplies the killer with lots of female victims (here it's a fashion salon), and greed as a motivating factor in many of the murders.

Another early entry in the genre was *LIBIDO* (1965), directed by Vittorio Salerno and Ernesto



American release ad mat for *PLUCKED*. One of the strangest Giallos, or any other sub-genre, ever made.

Gastaldi. Gastaldi directed only this one thriller, but scripted an even dozen, many of which could be considered among the very best. *LIBIDO* starred Giancarlo Giannini (who later found fame in Lina Wertmuller films) as an unstable young man in line to inherit a fortune. All the more reason why someone is trying to drive him crazy, another oft-repeated thriller plot element.

1967 marked the debut of prolific director Antonio Margheriti with the listless *NUDE... SI MUORE* aka *THE YOUNG, THE EVIL AND THE SAVAGE* and, perhaps the strangest Giallo (and a personal favorite) ever made, *LA MORTE HA FATTO L'UOVO* (*PLUCKED*). Director Giulio Questi mixes Gina Lollobrigida, Ewa (CANDY) Aulin and headless, wingless chickens, for a most unique cinematic repast.

1967's final Giallo was *IL DOLCE CORPO DI BEBORAH* (*THE SWEET BODY OF DEBORAH*) directed by Romolo Guerrieri, a film nearly as important as the initial Bava films in establishing the standards for this sub-genre of films. Many of the film's cast would make the Giallo their own special niche, notably American actress Carroll (BABY DOLL '56) Baker who would recreate her role, as a woman who is not quite what she seems, many times. The film also featured another Giallo acting staple, George Hilton. Watch out for this guy, nine times out of ten, he turns out to be the vil-

lain. The notorious Umberto Lenzi made his debut thriller in '68 with the X-rated *ORGASMO* (*PARANOIA*) and followed it in 1969 with *COSI' DOLCI PERVERSA* (*SO SWEET, SO PERVERSE*), both of which featured Baker.

1970's big news was Sergio Martino's debut Giallo, *LO STRANO VIZIO DELLA SIGNORINA WARDH* (*THE NEXT VICTIM*). For my money, Martino is the unsung genius of the field, yet, except for *TORSO '73*, very few of his thrillers received US theatrical release. *THE NEXT VICTIM* centered around a complex plot about driving a young heiress (played by the stunning Italian beauty, Edwige Fenech) to suicide. Martino's work always mixed sex and violence and this film is no exception. Other Martino Giallos worth seeking out include: *LA CODA DELLO SCORPIONE* (*THE CASE OF THE SCORPION'S TAIL '71*), *TUTTI I COLORI DEL BUIO* (*DAY OF THE MANIAC '72*) which mixes black magic in with the thriller elements, and *IL TUO VIZIO E UNA STANZA CHIUSA E SOLO IONE HO LA CHIAVE* (*GENTLY BEFORE SHE DIES '72*) Martino's version of Poe's *THE BLACK CAT*.

Massimo Dallamano's *COSA AVETE FATTO A SOLANGE* (*WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO SOLANGE?*) was the first of two (see also *LA POLIZIA CHIEDE AIUTO—WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO YOUR DAUGHTERS?* '74) films he focused around a mad killer offing pubescent school girls, most noted for its graphic, sexually themed murders, Ennio Morricone's score and the early screen presence of Camille Keaton (*ISPIT ON YOUR GRAVE '80*).

Italian horror film pioneer Riccardo Freda's *L'IGUANA DALLA LINGUA DI* (*THE IGUANA WITH A TONGUE OF FIRE '71*) is not one of his favorites. However, the gruesome throat slittings, acid disfigurements and the presence of the multiple killers motif, make it an important entry. Using reptiles in the title was popular that year as future goremeister Lucio Fulci's *UNA LUCERTOLA CON LA PELLE DI DONNA* (*A LIZARD IN A WOMAN'S SKIN, '71*) twisted genre conventions by having a



A scene echoed in nearly every Giallo. *BLACK BELLY OF THE TARANTULA* ('71).

woman turn out to be the murderer. The film suffered censorship troubles in Italy and its special effects artist, Carlo Rambaldi, had to demonstrate his effects models in court to prove that no real animals had been killed in the film's incredibly realistic canine disembowelments.

The death of a child is also a popular Giallo convention to explain the triggering of homicidal tendencies. Tonino Valerii's *MIO CARO ASSASSINO* (*MY DEAR KILLER '71*) features George Hilton (in a rare appearance as a good guy) as a cop who uncovers the connection between a string of deaths and the slaying of a young girl. The film offers a perverse tribute to Hitchcock's *PSYCHO* by unveiling an explicit circular saw murder in a bathroom!

1971's other important Giallo debut was Paolo Cavara's *LA TARANTOLA VAL VENTRE NERO* (*THE BLACK BELLY OF THE TARANTULA*), a stylish-looking film which is a mess in terms of plot. Cavara sidetracks the film with a drug subplot that's never resolved and gives the killer an inordinately weak motivation (impotence). (Ah, but that opening massage, given to a nude Barbara Bouchet, is worth the price of admission.)

Next issue we begin the survey with 1972, the most prolific year in Giallo's 30-year history. Films reviewed in this column are available from Video Search of Miami, (305) 387-6807. □

## THE SCORE

by Randall D. Larson

You'd think after ten years providing top-rate scores to films like *HELLRAISER*, *THE FLY II*, and *FLOWERS IN THE ATTIC*, Christopher Young wouldn't have to audition anymore.

But, because his credits are not from what the industry views as top-shelf, prestige productions, the 33-year-old composer still had to prove himself before being hired to compose the music for George Romero's film version of Stephen King's *THE DARK HALF*. Then, when the financial collapse of Orion Pictures left that film's release in limbo for months, Young had similar trials getting the job to score Bruce Robinson's psychological thriller, *JENNIFER 8*. In each case Young had to overcome studio interference that threatened to overlook his talents in favor of a "name" composer such as John Williams, Jerry Goldsmith or Danny Elfman.

Young was inspired to pursue composing, while still in his teens, by the music of the legendary Bernard Herrmann. Early training eventually led to work with veteran film scorer David Raskin and finally his own first score, a forgettable stalk-and-slash called *PRANKS* (a.k.a. *THE DORM THAT DRIPPED BLOOD*). It was his next score, working with a full orchestra in an inventive mixture of symphonic music and "musique concrete" effects, on the equally unmemorable *DEF-CON 4*, that first brought him attention.

Over the next seven years Young helmed a variety of assignments, including the first two *HELLRAISER* films, *NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET II*, an eventually rejected score for Tobe Hooper's audience-rejected *INVADERS FROM MARS* remake, the eclectically avant-garde *HAUNTED SUMMER*, and a series of Vietnam war films including *BAT-21*,

HBO's *VIETNAM WAR STORIES*, and an Emmy-nominated score for *THE LAST FLIGHT OUT*. While his style is varied, Young frequently returns to the horror genre. Unlike many, he is not reluctant to do so. His imaginative uses of instrumentation, natural sound effects, electronics and dynamic orchestrations have provided the perfect counterpart for numerous films of terror and the macabre.

Romero's film was a high profile assignment and as Young recalls, "Many people were extremely anxious to get involved in it." Romero had been campaigning for Henry Mancini for the job, while resisting the studio's suggestion of synthesist Mark Isham who had impressed them with his work on *REVERSAL OF FORTUNE*. Young gained Romero's attention as a result of a demo tape that included a 17-minute cue from his *HIDER IN THE HOUSE* score. "I was the first guy they (Orion and Romero) could agree on," Young said.

The initial problem facing Young was Romero's preconceived notions of what the film's score should be. Romero had put together a very effective temporary score made up of previously recorded music (a standard practice in post-production designed to give a sense of style and mood). Much of the material was synthesized and Young found that this was the approach most favored by the director.

"I tried to tap into the otherworldly dimensions of the novel, and to get deeper than the image would allow," Young said of his *DARK HALF* score.



Film composer Christopher Young: Despite a large and varied body of work, Young still has to fight to land prestige work like *THE DARK HALF*.

"My own impression was that it really would behoove the picture to have an orchestra score," said Young. "This is the first picture I've worked on where there were definitely two poles operating throughout the whole process. The studio, wanting to give the film a higher production value, were very pro-orchestra. George supported me in doing what I thought was right, but it was clear he was inclined for a synth score.

Young composed a score for strings, large percussion, French horns and synthesizers, supplemented by a boy's choir. "It's a sedate score, subdued," says Young. "There's this element of cerebral horror in the picture, so the score's fairly slow-moving. The religious connotations of the birds in the film prompted the idea of

the boy's choir, which appears in and out during the score. Two principal themes ground the score, a simple theme on celesta and vibes with accompanying strings, which reflects Thad's innocence and his connection at an early age with his lost twin, and the bird's theme."

For *THE DARK HALF*, Young composed nearly 70 minutes of the ambient, textural music that he has been noted for on *HELLRAISER* and *THE VAGRANT*, as well as the more melodically dynamic orchestrations of his work on *THE FLY II* or *THE HIDER IN THE HOUSE*.

Striving to accentuate the complexities of the story and characters that Romero's film didn't have time to explore, Young says he tried to "allow us to tap into the mystery of this story. I felt that the score could convey some the otherworldly dimensions of the novel and allow us to get into Thad's head deeper than the image would allow."

While *THE DARK HALF* has languished on Orion's bankrupt shelves for over a year, Young has kept busy scoring Chris Walas's *THE VAGRANT*, an action film titled *RAPID FIRE*, and the big-budgeted serial killer flop, *JENNIFER 8*. A task that proved far more difficult than *THE DARK HALF*.

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## NEMESIS EFFECTS

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cyborg models in order to manipulate their movements.

The "go-motion" process involves dissecting the footage of the models down to individual frames and "blurring" it between exposures. "We're actually doing stop-motion," said Kleinow. "When we say 'go-motion' that means that when the camera starts to roll, all these little computerized motors take off and move one tiny increment of the entire motion. That gives it a realistic blur which is exactly like you get in live action."

On screen the result of the combination of stop and go-motion animation, and rear projection delivers the promised goods admirably. The scene of Gruner fighting the skeleton moves fluidly, without jerky or stilted movements, to become the effects highpoint of the film.

Director Albert Pyun hopes to get top value from an effects budget that is probably a fraction of Arnold Schwarzenegger's daily per diem. □

## KUNG FU RASCALS

continued from page 49

ran into real kicks and real kicks ran into people. There were some sore guts, bloody lips, but nobody broke anything," said Espiritu.

The actor/writer is still amazed that Wang was able to pull off the project. "He basically didn't work on anything else for a year. It was his show and he put all of his time into it. Nobody worked as hard as he did. But it's also amazing how much hard work was put in by other people. Mike Bastings would be hanging out of trees by one arm, just to get a shot and he'd never complain. The whole camera crew almost drowned in the ocean when we were filming the wargod sequence. People just stayed excited about the project and did the work. Steve did a great job of leading a group effort."

As for the success of the effort, Espiritu set a simple standard for the project's potential video viewers. "If you look at it and laugh, it's accomplished what it's supposed to." □

## TURTLE ACROBATS

continued from page 51

never have that problem with our fellow Turtles 'cause we're all in the same boat." For Fraser, the thought of being immortalized as a Ninja Turtle is thrilling. "Being an adult, I wasn't a big Turtle fan, I hadn't even seen the two movies. But after getting involved in it and appreciating the movies, I see it's bigger than life. In many respects these guys are heroes and it's great. Kids should have heroes." □

## KNIGHTS

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Long was confident her fighting skills would be more than satisfactory for the work in KNIGHTS, and had faith in her acting ability, but she did worry about working with such a well-traveled star as Kristoferson. She said that as soon as she met him, though, her fears were put to rest. "I thought it would be intimidating, but it wasn't. He's such an easygoing guy, just a good old boy. We became friends instantly. Almost all of the scenes I did were with either him or Lance, who's also a wonderful actor."

If Long truly enjoyed the shoot, she may get a chance to enjoy it some more. Word is out that Pyun has already designed and scripted the sequel to KNIGHTS and is particularly high on the project because he sees it as an extension of the work he did early in his career with esteemed Japanese director Akira Kurosawa.

Long is interested in pursuing Nea's story, but finds herself with a very busy film schedule ahead and several possible projects being discussed. "I'm probably my own worst critic," she said. "The first time I saw the film, I looked for every possible mistake. I had to see it a couple of times before I could really enjoy it."

Much has been made of the presence Long brings to the screen, that of a woman with a fetching innocent charm that belies her tremendous physical strength. She said it's an image that she is comfortable with. "I think I'm a good kid. I like people. But I can handle myself if I ever get into trouble. It's been a lot of hard work. I've had both of my hands broken, my shins broken, my ribs broken, my cheeks fractured and my muscles pulled and torn. There have been many trials, but I look at the way my life is going now and know that it's all been worth it." □

## THE SCORE

continued from page 60

Young replaced veteran composer Maurice Jarre, whose work director Bruce Robinson found inappropriate. Young listened to Robinson's suggestions for the score and found them largely effective. "Let's face it...I was the second person brought in and Bruce had a bad experience with the first. This was my first shot at a big, major picture, and I'd have been a jackass if I wasn't going to pay attention to what he had to say."

While Robinson had faith in Young's ability to deliver the film's suspenseful music he was concerned over the composer's ability to deliver the romantic themes of the relationship between Uma Thurman and Andy Garcia. Young

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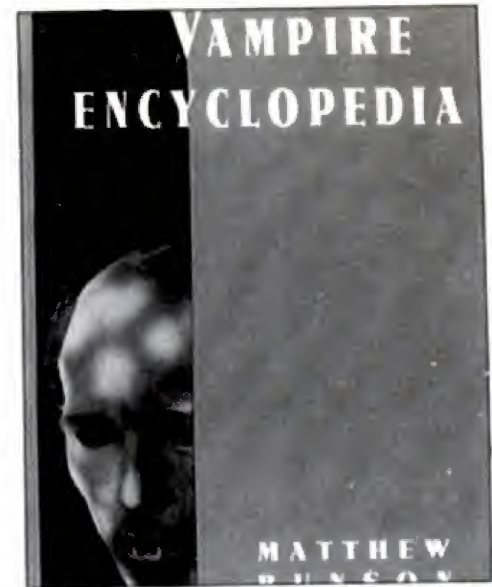
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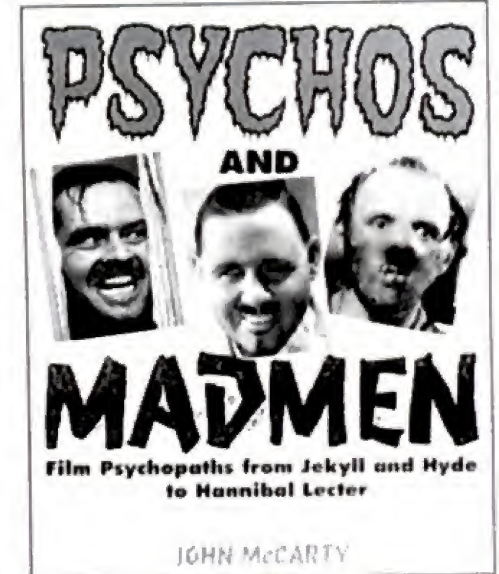
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Christopher Atkins and Stacey Travis in Roger Corman's *DRACULA RISING*, distributed by Concorde Pictures.

incorporated the fact that Thurman's character plays a cello in developing her theme, and incorporated it in into the romantic theme as well. The orchestral material provides the thematic basis of the score while synth work is used to create the pure atmospheric moments. Together they create an environment of mystery.

Young had hoped that *JENNIFER 8* would be a hit and that thanks to it "the next time I'm up for a legit picture at a major studio I'd at least be given a shot, not be passed over because my credits aren't prestigious enough." With *DARK HALF* finally released he can only hope that it may help accomplish this goal.

Still, the stigma of being a "horror" composer doesn't bother him. The bulk of his music has tended to be for films of terror and torment. "It's not by coincidence that I happen to work frequently in these kinds of films. I love horror pictures, I love suspense thrillers. It's not that I want to work entirely in these kinds of films. However, I have asked myself if I'd feel content, at the conclusion of my life, if I'd committed my entire output to horror pictures. I don't think there will be anything wrong with that." □

## ROGER CORMAN

continued from page 7

\$40 million budget for a film based on Marvel's *Fantastic Four* comic, he found himself faced with either the expiration of his rights to the title, or an alternative production. Enter Corman. The \$40 million project became a trim \$4 million pro-

duction. Clinton should have such help with the budget.

To accomplish this seemingly unimaginable piece of financial legerdemain, Corman made two major decisions. "We knew we couldn't afford to do all of the effects in the script, and we didn't want to do a cheap version of those effects, so we figured out which effects were most important and put our money there—on the effects we considered to be significant," explained Corman. "Then we decided that the property, *THE FANTASTIC FOUR*, was its own star. We'd get good actors, but unknowns, not spend money on a star cast. I think it's a good theory. If I had the budget of a *BATMAN I* might have a different theory. But this one works for us."

Corman sees the future of the fantastic film genres as healthy, but feels that two points have to be recognized by his fellow low-budget impresarios. "The very lowest budget films aren't doing well—the films have to be made a little bit bigger, and frankly, a little bit better; and secondly, the majors are dominating the theatrical market more than at any time I can remember. It's too difficult to compete with these \$50 and \$100-million films. Home video has become increasingly important. That's why we started our own video label. A few years ago, we could compete theatrically with a \$10-million film. We might not be as good, but it wasn't such a gulf, and the audience would accept it. Now an audience is expected to pay the same amount for a \$1 or 2 million film as for a \$50-100 million film, and that

is just an impassable gulf." □

## MAKING OF NEMESIS

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ing with a lot of action," there are elements of cyberpunk in the picture as well. The awesome devastation of the Kaiser Steel plant is well-suited to the stylistic movement's pessimistic vision of the future. From the comics of Japan's "Akira" and America's "Neuromancer" to the novels of William Gibson and Bill Sterling, Pyun, an admitted admirer of cyberpunk and its ability to capture teenage alienation, hopes *NEMESIS* will do justice to the pop culture phenomenon.

"Hopefully, we'll bring that off, not make it too dark, not make it too gory. Those things [cyberpunk comics] tend to be a little bit heavy metalish. The other night we shot an action scene and at the end of it this person turned to me and said, 'Well, now I understand what heavy metal is all about.'" □

## RED DWARF PILOT

continued from page 11

seem off, the gags fail to fly thick and fast, and the whole thing has a rather antiseptic, but dead, appearance. Not surprisingly, NBC declined to pick up the pilot to add to its schedule and the fate of the series seems to be in doubt. One can only hope that PBS will continue to catch up with the marvelous original series. □

## ALIEN 3 REVIEW

continued from page 37

slick, gritty, visual *tour-de-force*, but also in stressing the emotional aspect over the kill factor.

Why didn't anyone like it? Moviegoers (at least the average ones) go to see something entertaining,

something *fun* and then it's out into the fresh air again, back to reality. People like to have heroes; people like to see the impossible made possible, the unaccomplishable accomplished. As contemporary audiences, we love the wise-cracking, villain-bashing Bruce Willises, the beautiful and submissive Julia Robertses, the endlessly dextrous and cunning Macaulay Caulkins, maybe even a man that dresses like a bat and saves us from all the bad guys.

But real people? Characters that feel and hurt and bleed? Rarely do we see a human interest movie ever make it big at the box office: a movie about humans—our sicknesses, our neuroses, our fears, our potentials. And for tapping into that which we are so unaccustomed to confronting in popular entertainment, the movie digs its own grave. This was its crucial mistake: the audience targeted by the film was not equal to its intricacies.

James Cameron's imaginary-gun-toting action fans, still fresh from the fast-paced *ALIENS*, were looking for new ways to bash the bug, not social criticism and artistic cinematography. The team atmosphere was eliminated by use of realistic characters with realistic attitudes. Fincher spared a convenient pre-packaged conclusion for a powerful statement. The good guys did not have a definite win over the bad guys and in truth, the good guys actually *were* the bad guys. The Company killed themselves in their fervor to claim the alien, and our heroine killed *herself* to ensure its destruction.

It was this blurring of Hollywood's rigid black-and-white format for good and evil that saved *ALIEN 3*. The film sucked the make-believe, happy-go-lucky "all the bad guys get their own" mentality right out of its audience, and gave them a taste of reality, so often ignored in Hollywood films. Instead of shooting for the mainstream, a horror movie chock full of entrails, but no *guts*, *ALIEN 3* chanced a leap for something deeper, something more *relevant*. And that made all the difference. □

## THE STAND

continued from page 15

amount it's not what they would have liked. "I can tell you that in these difficult economic times it's probably one of the more substantial budgets. But ironically it's not enough money. I have to rely on everyone's creativity, skill and enthusiasm to make this work. In fact everybody's chipping in to some extent. So what seems like a substantial amount of money, when spread over a production of this size and scope, doesn't seem like so much when you go out and do your job every day." □

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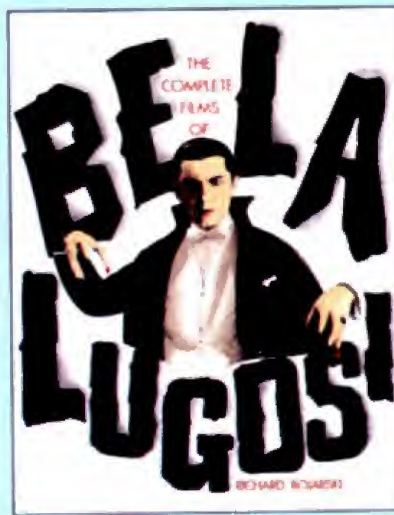
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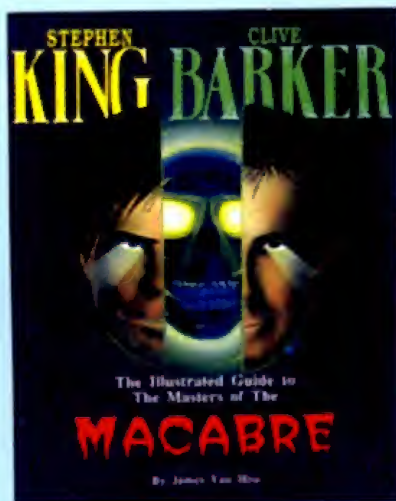
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